

Aut Diabolus

Aut Nihil



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AUT DIABOLUS AUT NIHIL

AND OTHER TALES

R. S. Goodwin
St. Paul

AUT DIABOLUS

AUT NIHIL

AND OTHER TALES

By X. L.

AUTHOR OF

"LITTLE HAND AND MUCKLE GOLD"

SECOND EDITION

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WALTER BESANT, Esq.

AS A SLIGHT TRIBUTE OF ADMIRATION TO

THE AUTHOR

AND OF ESTEEM TO

THE FRIEND

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PREFACE



ON the appearance in *Blackwood's Magazine* of "Aut Diabolus aut Nihil," one of the leading literary journals of this country, while speaking of the story in most undeservedly flattering terms, intimated that considerable speculation was rife as to the identity of the characters in this sketch. Of course, had the matter ended there it would have been of not the slightest importance, but names having been mentioned, not only in newspapers, but in society, and the names of intimate friends of mine, I venture to take advantage of the opportunity afforded me by the republication of this story, to give an emphatic and unqualified denial to the rumour that the characters in this little drama are portraits—at least, so far as those gentlemen are concerned who are my personal friends. The Abbé Hurel, "the eloquent preacher of

the Madeleine," one of the most delightful men living, and one who has been a very dear and intimate friend of mine for the past seventeen years, is certainly not the original of the abbé of my story; nor is my friend the Duc de Montmorency the original of the Duc de Frontignan, to whom, indeed, he bears not the slightest resemblance. Paul Demidoff I knew but slightly, and only towards the close of his life. He was a very trivial voluptuary and flippant cynic—a man quite content with being merely an Apollo and a millionaire. He is obviously, therefore, not the original of Prince Pomerantseff. The facts connected with this little story are simple enough. Some years ago that most perfect type of French chivalry, General de Charette, the Christian knight *sans peur et sans reproche*, told me that a curé (whether in Paris or not I don't remember, nor can I recall whether he said he knew him personally) had, after preaching on the personality of the devil, been invited by someone to attend a séance and see his Satanic Majesty, and had accepted the invitation and seen the Prince of Evil. That was all. It was a very meagre episode as narrated by the great Pontifical

Zouave, and the devil seen by his curé was a very ordinary and uninteresting devil, in nowise resembling the Prince of Evil whom Pomerantseff and his friends show to the Abbé Girod.

I may say in conclusion, that whereas of course all the characters in this little story are sketched from life in a broad and general way, the only real portrait which it contains is that of his Satanic Majesty himself. My description of the Prince of Evil is—as indeed many of my readers will recognise at once—a photograph taken from life. I have to thank the proprietors of *Blackwood's Magazine*, *Macmillan's Magazine*, *Pall Mall Magazine*, and *Temple Bar*, for having kindly permitted me to republish these tales.

X. L.

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AUT DIABOLUS AUT NIHIL

THE TRUE STORY OF A HALLUCINATION



“πρὸς τῶν θεῶν, ἐνύπνιον ἐστιώμιθα;”—ARISTOPHANIS Σφῆκισ.

“Again, I believe that all that use sorceries, incantations, and spells, are not witches, or, as we term them, magicians; I conceive there is a traditional magic, not learned immediately from the devil, but at second-hand from his scholars, who, having once the secret betrayed, are able and do empirically practise without his advice; they proceeding upon the principles of nature, where actives aptly conjoined to disposed passives will, under any master, produce their effects.”—SIR THOMAS BROWNE: *Rel. Med.*

CHAPTER I

To be ordained has been looked upon for many years in this country as the best, speediest, and safest way of “making gentlemen” of such bipeds as stand in sore need of the transformation.

As we are all by baptism spiritually cleansed of all blemish, so is the son of the tradesman,

doctor, solicitor, or what not, socially regenerated by taking holy orders.

Now this bewildering wholesale social acceptance of the ninety-and-nine who positively decline to stray, finding it a much more profitable policy to stay quietly in the fold nibbling the fodder, is peculiar to Protestant communities, and we do not find the same social indulgence extended to spiritual advisers in Roman Catholic countries. In climes still fascinated by the scintillations proceeding from the Triple Crown, the priest is not received—that is, familiarly received—apart from his official capacity in society. He is, of course, ever to be forthcoming and at hand as a professional healer of souls when no other or better healer of souls can be found, and when a soul needs healing very badly ; but if he be not a man of culture and refinement,—that is, if he has failed to catch the tricks, manners, and bearings of such—for the mere question of birth is, of course, of minor importance, the laying on of the bishop's hands having smoothed over all that difficulty,—the mere fact of his being a priest does not entitle him to claim any of the privileges accruing to that most elastic title of gentleman ; and many a woman of social rank abroad will readily, gladly—nay, eagerly—confess to, and receive absolution from, a man whose society at her dinner-table she would not tolerate for a moment.

We cannot but think that this reserve has its advantages, and that all people of refined feeling benefit by a rule which requires from one seeking familiar social recognition the production of some other credential, save only that the postulant be a servant of the Church.

At home, we find the spiritual adviser, merely by reason of his office, entitled to lay a claim—nay, actually laying a claim—to a place at our dinner-table, to a chair at our club, to the smoking of our cigars, the drinking of our wines, the riding of our horses, the consoling of our wives, and, alas! the marrying of our daughters, when, in many instances, the social merits of the man himself would hardly justify him, under ordinary circumstances, in aspiring to a closer intimacy with us than may reasonably be expected to arise from the proper exercise of his professional duties in the saving of our souls, and the flogging of our boys.

Such a man being so received, in the event of his not being sweet and whole, will hardly think it worth his while to purify himself of his uncleanness solely for our sakes—nay, in many instances, will take a grotesque and savage delight in endeavouring to widen, by his vulgarities, the deplorable breach which, if we are to believe cynics and scoffers, already exists between St. James's Square and Mount Sinai.

Abroad, the priest who would seek to be considered a gentleman, and be received as such in society, must endeavour to imbue himself with some of the refinement innate in those with whom he would fain consort, and thus it happens that he studies with more or less success to imitate such *ad unguem facti homines* as may from time to time swim within his ken.

So it is that we not unfrequently find (and oddly enough more often than not in the most exclusive social coteries like that of the Faubourg St.-Germain), not only the most charming, refined, and sought-after men to be priests, but also to be men of low birth and origin, who owe, however, their social recognition and success, not to their cloth, but to the grace with which they have learned to wear it. To such a man as this we will now introduce the reader.

The career of the Abbé Girod had been an eminently successful one—successful in every way; and even he himself was forced to acknowledge such to be the case as he reviewed his past life, sitting by a blazing fire in his comfortable apartment in the Rue Miromesnil previous to dressing for the Duc de Frontignan's dinner-party.

Born of poor parents in the south of France, entering the priesthood at an early age, having received but a meagre education, and that chiefly confined to a superficial knowledge of the most

elementary treatises on theology, he had, in five-and-twenty years, and solely by his own exertions, unaided by patronage, obtained a most desirable berth in one of the leading churches in Paris, thereby becoming the recipient of a handsome income, and being thus enabled to indulge in his rather expensive tastes as *dilettante* and *homme du monde*.

The few hours snatched from his parochial duties he had never failed to devote to study, and his application and determination had borne him golden fruit in more ways than one. He had, moreover, so cultivated and made such good use of the rare opportunities afforded him in early life of associating with gentlemen, that when now at length he found his presence in demand at every house in the "Faubourg" where wit and graceful learning were appreciated, no one would ever have suspected he had not been nurtured and bred in accordance with the strictest canons of social refinement.

But in his upward progress such had been his experiences of life that when, during the brief intervals of breathing-time he allowed himself, he would look below and above, down to where he had begun and up to where he was endeavouring to climb, he was forced to confess that at every step a belief, an illusion, had been trodden under foot; that the clouds of glory of

which Wordsworth speaks had either altogether died away on the horizon, or had become so threatening and dark in aspect as to make him instinctively seek refuge under the umbrella of cynicism; and he would wonder, while bracing himself for a new effort, how it would all end, and whether the mitre he lusted for would not perhaps, after all, be placed upon a head that doubted even the existence of a God.

He was not, however, a bad man, but merely one of that class who have embraced the priesthood merely as a means of raising themselves from obscurity to eminence, and have, in their intercourse with the world, discovered many flaws and blemishes in what at one time they may have considered perfect. He was indeed only fervent in his apolausticism; and the embracing of such golden images as he might care to adore, he found dangerous to his peace of mind, in that the gilding thereof was but too apt to come off upon his lips. When at first his reason began to reject many of the dreams and fables hitherto cherished and believed in, the Abbé Girod was almost inclined to abandon in despair any attempt to discern the false from the true, and this all the more that he saw plainly the time thus spent was in a worldly sense but wasted, and that the good things of this world come to such reapers as gather in

wheat and tares alike, well knowing there is a market for them both.

During a certain period, therefore, of his struggle upward—

“An infant crying in the night,
An infant crying for the light,
And with no language but a cry,”—

while his wordly ambition was aiding by sly insinuations the deadly work already begun by the destruction of his dreams, Henri Girod was nigh being an atheist.

But the nature of the man was too finely sensual for this phase to be lasting; and when at length he found himself so far successful in his wordly aspirations as to be tolerably sure of their complete fulfilment; when at length he found time to examine spiritual matters apart from their direct bearing upon his social altitude, his æsthetic sense—which by this time had necessarily developed—was struck as by a new revelation, and thrilled and entangled by the exquisite *beauty* of Christianity; and thus, as a shallow philosophy had nearly reduced him to become an atheist, so a deep and sensual spirit of sentimentality nearly reconciled him to becoming a Christian.

His Madonna was the Madonna of Raphael, not that of Albert Dürer: the woman whose placid grace of countenance creates an emotion more

subtly voluptuous than desire ; not she in whose face can be discerned the human mother of the Man of Sorrows and of Him divinely acquainted with all grief. The Christ he adored was not the Friend of the broken-hearted, the Healer of the blind Bartimeus, He whom Andrea del Mantegna shows us hanging on the cross ; but He "who feedeth among the lilies"—the Alpha and Omega of all æsthetic conception. Christianity, in a word, he looked upon as the highest moral expression of artistic perfection, and he regarded it with the same admiration he accorded to the Antinous and the Venus of Milo.

He was not, however, by nature a pagan as some men are, men who, in the words of De Musset—

"Sont venus trop tard dans un monde trop vieux" ;

but the atmosphere in which his early years had been passed had been so antagonistic and stifling to his warm sensuous nature, his inner life had been so cramped in and starved, that when at length the key of gold opening the prison door let in the outer air, his spirit revelled in the wild extravagance so often found accompanying sudden and long-wished-for emancipation.

His nature was perhaps not one that could have been attuned to a perfect harmony with

that of a Greek or Roman of the golden days, but one rather better calculated to enjoy the hybrid atmosphere of the Italian Renaissance; and he would have been in his element in the Rucellai Gardens, conversing with feeble little Cosimino or laughing with Buondelmonte and Luigi Alamanni.

He did not trouble himself to believe in the narrative of the Bible; but its precepts and tendencies he appreciated and admired, although it must in all honesty be confessed he did not always put himself out to follow them.

In his heart he utterly rejected all idea of a future life, since it was incompatible with his conception of the artistic unity of this; but then again, he would blandly acknowledge to himself that there are perhaps, after all, things we cannot comprehend, and that beauty may have no term.

Being, however, broadly speaking, an honest man, and one unwilling to eat bread he had not earned, he assimilated so far as in him lay his duties as a priest with his ideas as a man of culture; and his sermons were ever of Love—sermons which, winged as they were with impassioned eloquence, were deservedly popular with all, from the scholar who delighted in them as intellectual feasts to the fashionable *mondaine* who was only too enchanted to find in the

quasi-fatalistic and broadly-charitable views enunciated therein, excuses whereby her dreary and vulgar intrigues might be considered in a light more pleasing to herself and more consoling to her husband.

On the Sunday afternoon preceding the evening on which we introduce him to the reader, the abbé had departed from his usual custom, and by special request of his curé had preached a most remarkable sermon on the personality of Satan.

It is a vulgar error to suppose that men succeed best when their efforts are enlivened by a real belief in the matter in hand. Not only have some men such a superabundance of fervid imagination that they can, for the time being, provoke themselves into a pseudo-belief in what they know in their saner moments to be false, and thus fire themselves with real enthusiasm for a mere myth and shadow; but, moreover, a large class of men are endowed with minds so restless and so finely strung that they can play with a sophism with marvellous dexterity and skill, while lacking that vigorous and comprehensive grasp of mind which the lucid exposition of a hidden truth necessitates.

The Abbé Girod belonged a little to both these classes of beings; and, moreover, his vanity as an intellectual man provoked him to

extraordinary exertions in cases wherein he fancied he might win for himself the glory of strengthening and verifying matters which in themselves perhaps lacked almost the elements of existence.

“Spiritual truths,” he once cynically remarked to Sainte Beuve, whom, by the way, he detested, “will take care of themselves: it is the nursing of spiritual falsehood that needs all the care of the clergy.”

On the Sunday in question he had surpassed himself. With biting irony he had annihilated the disbelievers in divine punishment, and then with persuasive and overwhelming eloquence he had urged the necessity of believing, not only in hell, but in the personality of the Prince of Evil.

Women had fainted in their terror, men had been frightened into seeking the convenient solace of the confessional, and the archbishop had written him a letter of the warmest congratulation and thanks.

It was a triumph which a man of the nature of the Abbé Girod particularly enjoyed. The idea of finding himself the successful reviver of an inanimate doctrine, while secretly conscious that he was in reality a sceptic in matters of dogmatically vital importance, was, to a mind so prone to delight in paradoxes, eminently agreeable; and it tickled his palate with a sharp,

pungent joy to see the letter of the archbishop lying upon a volume of Strauss, and to read the glowing and extravagant praise lavished upon himself in the pages of the *Univers*, after having enjoyed a sparkling draught of Voltaire.

CHAPTER II

SUCH was the Abbé Girod, the type of a class. The Duc de Frontignan, with whom he was dining on the evening this story opens, was, or rather *is*, in many ways a no less remarkable personage in Paris society.

Possessing rank, birth, and a splendid income, he had been blessed with more than a fair share of the good gifts of providence, being endowed, not only with considerable mental power, but with the tact to use that power to the best advantage. Although beyond doubt clever, he was universally esteemed a much more intellectual man than he really was, and this through no voluntary and wilful deceitfulness on his part, but simply owing to a method he had unconsciously adopted of exhibiting his wares with their most favourable aspect to the front.

He was well read, but not deeply read, and yet all Paris considered him a profound scholar ;

he was quick and epigrammatic in his appreciation and expression of ideas, as men of cultivation and varied experience are apt to be ; but he enjoyed the reputation of being a wit without ever having said a really good thing ; and finally, having merely lounged through the world, impelled by a spirit of restlessness begotten of great wealth and idleness, society looked upon him as a bold and adventurous traveller. Only the day before we have the pleasure of introducing him to our readers, he had politely declined to leave Paris and conduct an expedition to the North Pole, but had generously volunteered to give a large sum to anyone who cared to risk his life in endeavouring to discover that inestimable boon to suffering humanity known as the North-West Passage, for which we are all so hungrily longing, and which Millais, aided and abetted by Trelawny, asserts to be the bounden duty of England to find out ; at the same time promising to take care of and provide for the widows and orphans of such adventurers as might find the climate of the Pole, or the appetites of the indigenous bears, a serious impediment to their safe return and ultimate reception of the conqueror's laurels, with which we should all so eagerly greet them.

One gift he most certainly possessed, and that to an eminent degree : he was vastly amusing

and entertaining, and resembled in that respect the Abbé Galiani, as described by Diderot, for he was indeed "a treasure on rainy days ; and if the cabinetmakers made such things, nobody would be without one in the country."

He not only knew everybody in Paris, but he possessed that precious, rare, and extraordinary faculty of drawing people out, and of forcing them to make themselves amusing. No man, indeed, was in his society long before—often to his own great surprise—openly discussing his most cherished hobby with a new and unwonted eloquence hatched by apparent sympathy, or airily scattering as seed for trivial conversation the fruit of long years of experience and reflection. From what has been said, it may be superfluous to add that the Hôtel de Frontignan, in the Rue de Varenne, was the resort, lounging-place, and almshouse of all that was most remarkable and extraordinary in the fashionable, the artistic, the diplomatic, and the scientific world.

His intimacy with the Abbé Girod was one of long standing: they were bound together by one bond of union which (alas! how rarely it is forged!) is stronger and more enduring than many cemented by vows, prayers, and tears—they mutually amused each other; and while, on the one side, the keen intellect of the priest found much that was interesting in the shallow, but

attractive and brilliant, nature of the layman, the duke, on the other, entertained feelings of the warmest admiration for a man who, having risen from nothing, enlivened the most exclusive coteries with his graceful learning and charming wit.

It was one of the peculiar whims of Octave de Frontignan never to have an even number of guests at his dinner-table. His *soirées*, indeed, were attended by hundreds, but his dinner-parties rarely exceeded seven (including himself), and in many cases he only invited two.

On this especial occasion the only guest asked to meet the Abbé Girod was the celebrated diplomatist and millionaire, the Prince Paul Pomerantseff.

This most extraordinary personage had for the past six years kept Europe in a constant state of excitement by reason of his munificence, eccentricity, and power.

Brought up under the direct personal supervision of the Emperor of Russia, he had escaped the emasculating influence engendered by the atmosphere of the Corps des Pages, and had learnt at an early age to rely upon himself for his virtues, while ever ready to generously extend an indulgent confidence in his friends to be ready to provide him with the requisite amount of vices. He had distinguished himself as a diplo-

matist and as a soldier, and had left traces of his indomitable will in many State papers, as on many an enemy's face, during the period of the Crimean war.

In London, but perhaps more especially in "the Shires," his face was well known and liked, and his method of negotiating fences was as clean and clever as the negotiator himself. Duchesses' daughters had sighed for him, but in vain; and to the "endless desolation and impotent disdain" of mothers, the continuance of his celibacy appeared to be as certain as the splendour of his fortune. Pomerantseff had, moreover,—and this is really worthy of note,—escaped altogether from that most terrible because most hopeless and incurable of maladies, ennui; and he owed this miraculous immunity from the disease which almost always overwhelms the young, rich, prosperous, and powerful, to his lucky spirit of *insouciance*, which he had carefully cultivated from early youth—from, in fact, the moment when he had met with his first disappointment.

The monotony of happiness is perhaps the most hideous monotony of all to a thinking man; and the reason of this is obvious—it is unnatural. Pleasure, with its thousand subtle perfumes, exhausts the moral atmosphere as flowers absorb the oxygen in a closed room; and we all know

what the copybooks tell us about the feeling of diffidence entertained by nature as regards a vacuum. Then, again, the man who finds happiness, as it were, an inseparable accident of his life, like dining, will surely begin by fatal degrees to criticise and analyse the nature of it, as he will carefully choose the vintages of his wines. When he has reached this state he is lost ; for, as Champfort truly says, "Celui qui veut trop faire dependre son bonheur de sa raison, qui le soumet à l'examen, qui chicane, pour ainsi dire, ses jouissances, et n'admet que des plaisirs délicats finit par n'en plus avoir. C'est un homme qui a force de faire carder son matelas le voit diminuer et finit par coucher sur la dure."

But Pomerantseff carefully avoided this phylloxera of the lucky: in riding to hounds he always looked at the fence he was going to take ; in love he invariably ignored the heart he was supposed to be about to awaken ; so that, both in jumping and kissing, he met with but few "croppers." He had, moreover, one great and precious gift, that of making himself well beloved by his friends, and healthily feared by his enemies ; and the Abbé Girod, who had known him for many years, proved no exception to the general rule ; for, although their friendship had never ripened into great intimacy, there was perhaps no man in the wide circle of his acquaint-

ance in whose society the priest took a more lively pleasure.

“Late as usual!” cried the duke, as Girod hurried into the room ten minutes after the appointed time. “Prince, if you were so unpunctual in your diplomatic duties as the abbé is in his social (and, I *fear*, in his spiritual!), where would the world be?”

The abbé stopped short, pulled out his watch, and looked at it with a comically contrite air.

“Only ten minutes late; and I am sure when you think of the amount of business I have to transact, and the nature of it, you can afford to forgive me,” he said, as he advanced and shook hands warmly with his friends.

“To my mind,” said Pomerantseff, smiling, “dining being the most serious of our transient worldly pleasures, as it certainly is the most harmless,—for indigestion is the malady of fools, and does not concern the man *qui sait manger*,—anything that interferes with the proper enjoyment of it should be seriously punished as a crime of *lèse-volupté*!”

“You are right,” said the duke; “and as regards that, one of the most striking proofs of Shakespeare’s subtle insight into human nature is to be found in Macbeth. It is more than probable that a man so steeped in murder, and one who had contracted the rather dreary habit

of consorting with witches, would, under ordinary circumstances, have treated with well-merited contempt the ghostly visitations of that utterly uninteresting Banquo ; but to be annoyed at the supper-table was intolerable. This view, to my mind, gives the keynote to the latter part of the play."

"Capital!" cried the abbé. "That is quite a new idea. Fancy the Eumenides in the *pot au feu*! You cannot conceive," he continued, throwing himself lazily down upon a lounge, "you have no idea, of the amount of folly I am forced to listen to in a day. Every woman whose bad temper has got her into trouble with her husband, and every man whose stupidity has led him into quarrelling with his wife—one and all they come to me, pour out their misfortunes into my ears, and expect me to arrange their affairs."

But here the servant, announcing "M. le Duc est servi," interrupted the poor abbé's complaints.

CHAPTER III

"I TELL you what I should do," said Pomerantseff, when they were seated at table, the Cossack coming out, as it had annoyed him to have to wait. "I should say to every man and woman

who came to me on such errands, 'My dear friend, my business is with your spiritual welfare and with that alone. The doctor and solicitor must take care of your worldly concerns. It is my duty to ensure your eternal felicity, when the tedium of *delirium tremens* and the divorce court is all over, and that is really all one man can do.'

"Very well; but suppose they should reply to me," answered the abbé, quoting his favourite Novalis, "that 'life is a disease of the spirit.'"

"By the way," broke in the duke, "talking of spiritual matters, Pomerantseff has been telling me his experiences with a man you detest, abbé."

"I detest no man."

"I can only judge from your own words," rejoined Frontignan. "Did you not tell me years ago that you thought Home a more serious evil than the typhoid fever?"

"Ah, Home the medium!" cried Girod, in great disgust. "I admit you are right. It is not possible, prince, that you encourage Octave in his absurd spiritualism?"

But just at that moment came a whisper from a better world

"Chateau Margaux, M. l'Abbé?" murmured the butler in his ear.

"Wait!" cried the duke, as Girod was about

to smile assent; "I have some wine I want you to try." Then, turning to the butler, "Bring that Laffite Duqléré sent in yesterday, Gregoire. Now, abbé, taste that. I want your opinion before touching it myself or giving it to others. It is of the famous comet year, and of course you know the story of the sale. Duqléré sent me up a dozen yesterday as a present, with a charming note to say that he wanted the opinion of my friends, and especially of yourself. He added, that of course he could not think of charging me for it, since he bought it at such a ruinous price that no serious man would think of *buying* a bottle. He keeps it, therefore, merely as an advertisement, and to give to friends. He says, moreover, that although of course too old, it is still a generous wine."

The abbé looked carefully at the glass, and daintly swallowed a thimbleful; and then, after a pause of half a second, shook his head at the duke and said, smiling—

"Duqléré for once spoke the truth. It *is* a generous wine; far too generous, for it has given away all its best. Margaux, Gregoire."

"Capital!" laughed the duke. "I shall tell Duqléré your opinion, and he will probably sell out his stock at once. It cost him two hundred francs a bottle."

"It is possible to keep even wine too long,"

replied the abbé: and then added with a sweet smile, "here below all is but ephemeral and transitory, as you know."

You asked me just now, abbé, if I encouraged our friend here in his spiritualism, did you not?" asked Pomerantseff.

"I did."

The prince smiled gravely.

"Do not you know me well enough to know that I should never dare to presume to encourage any man in anything, *mon cher abbé*?"

"But you cannot believe in it?"

"I do most certainly believe in it."

"*Mon Dieu!*" exclaimed Girod. "What folly! What are we all coming to? If men like you and Octave encourage such vulgar jugglery, it will become so paying a game that we poor priests will stand no chance against the *prestigitateurs*. Robert Houdin will get the best of all the fathers of the Church in a week!"

"It has always struck me as most remarkable," said the duke, "that with all your taste for the curious and unknown, you have never been tempted into investigating the matter, abbé."

"I am, as you say, a lover of the curious," replied the priest, "but not of such empty trash as spiritualism. I have quite enough cares with the realities of this world, without bringing upon myself the misery which would surely be

entailed by investigating the possibilities of the next."

"That is a sentiment worthy of the Abbé Dubois," said Pomerantseff, laughing; and then the duke suddenly making some inquiry relative to the train which was to take him and the prince to Brunoy on a shooting expedition the following morning, the subject for the nonce was dropped.

When dinner was over, they repaired to the *fumoir*, which Frontignan had furnished with all the soft sensualism befitting such a temple of selfishness; and a man might, if so inclined, have not inaptly murmured to himself, on lighting his cigar and sinking into one of the voluptuous arm-chairs which embraced your limbs with a *chatterie* quite their own, "Moi seul, et c'est assez!"

But Pomerantseff strode towards the piano and opened it. "I want to sing you a rather pretty ballad a friend sent me from London yesterday," he said; "and as you both understand English perfectly, you will see that the words are rather above the ordinary level. They are written by a very dear friend of mine—a most extraordinary man—Tresilyan."

"Ah! Tresilyan is a friend of yours, is he?" said the duke.

"One of my dearest. Do you know him?"

“Hardly—although I have, of course, met him scores of times. He promised to stay with me for a few days last year at Chataigneraye”—one of the duke’s places—“on his return from the Baden races; but he wrote to excuse himself. It was a bore, for I had asked two of the princes to meet him.”

“Oh, of course,” laughed Pomerantseff, seating himself at the piano. “One can never catch him: he has so many engagements and friends, that his life is passed in saying in that wonderful voice of his, ‘Je le regrette, je ne demanderais pas mieux, mais c’est impossible!’” But one thing I will say for him: he does not pretend to be a poet; never publishes anything, and only writes for his own amusement. I am indeed one of the few men who know he writes verses at all. This thing he calls, I believe, ‘Æstas Captiva.’” And the prince hummed, in a clear, true, but unpretentious baritone voice, the following:—

I.

“I had thought when we met (for the year was moved
By the tears October must always bring),
I the lover, and you the loved,
I had said good-bye to spring.

II.

“How could I foresee what I now well know,
That you’d caught and imprisoned all summer’s best?
That June, beguiled by your bosom’s snow,
Lay throbbing within your breast?

III.

“That those blue-grey eyes could the sun eclipse ;
Hide him away, with his heat increased :
Though the roses peeped from your pouting lips,
Burning to be released ?

IV.

“That the secret of all the sweet flowers had said,
Only awaited one kiss of mine,
To awaken and thrill when I bowed my head,
Where you can well divine ?

V.

“But thus it chanced, as we both now know,
With a kiss from me and a kiss from you,
June lay revealed in your blushes' glow ;
Shall we keep her October through ?”

“You must not think me rude,” said the abbé, when Pomerantseff had got through his ditty ; “but whenever I hear any sentiment of that kind I think perforce of that profound but unappreciated remark of Voltaire, ‘The first man who compared a woman to a rose was a poet, the second a fool!’”

“Il est impayable, ce cher abbé !” said Pomerantseff to the duke, with a laugh, as he rose from his seat and resumed his still-lighted cigar. “What can we do, duke, to make this wretched little pagan less material in his views ?”

“Convert him to spiritualism,” said Fron-tignan.

"Never!" cried the abbé.

"It is absurd for you to disbelieve, for you know nothing about it, since you have never been willing to attend a séance, as you yourself admit."

"I *feel* it is absurd, and that is enough—for me at least."

"Certum est quia impossibile," murmured Pomerantseff, striking a match.

"I myself do not exactly believe in *spirits*," said Frontignan, thoughtfully.

"*À la bonne heure!* Of course not?" cried the abbé. "You see, prince, he is not quite mad after all!"

The prince said nothing.

"I cannot doubt the existence of some extraordinary phenomena," continued the young duke thoughtfully, "simply because I cannot bring myself to such an exquisite pitch of philosophical imbecility as to doubt my own senses; but, to my thinking, the exact nature of the phenomena remains as yet an open question. It is some phase of electro-biology which we do not yet understand. I have a theory of my own about it, and although it may be absurd and fantastical, it is certainly no more so than that which would have us believe that the spirits of the dear old lazy dead come back to the scenes of their human hopes and disappointments, their

lives and miseries, to pull our noses and play on tambourines."

"And may I ask you," inquired the prince, with a touch of sarcasm in his voice, "what this theory of yours may be?"

"I will give you," said the duke, ignoring the sneer, and stretching himself back in his chair, as he sent a ring of smoke curling daintily toward the ceiling,—“I will give you with great pleasure the result of my reflection about the matter. You are both far more clever men than I am, and you can draw your own conclusions.

"It is my belief that the things—the tangible things—we create, or rather cause to appear, when sitting with what is now called, for want of a better name, a materialising medium, come from within ourselves, and are portions of ourselves.

"We produce them, in the first instance, generally with fingers linked; but afterwards, when our nervous organisations are more harmonised to them, they come to us of themselves, and even against our wills.

"It is my belief that these are what we term our passions and our emotions, to whose existence the electric fluid and nervous ecstasy we cause to circulate and induce by sitting with hands linked merely gives a tangible and corporeal expression.

“And after all, why should not this be so? Why, as a matter of fact, is there anything extraordinary or improbable in the suggestion? We all know that grief, joy, remorse, and many other passions and emotions, can kill us as surely and in many instances as quickly as an assassin’s dagger; and it is a well-known scientific fact, that there are certain nerves in the hand between certain fingers which have a distinct and direct *rapport* with the brain, and by which the mind can be controlled.

“Since this is the case, why is it that under certain given conditions, such as sitting with hands linked—that thus sitting, and while the electric fluid, drawn out by the contact of our hands, forms a powerful medium between the inner and the outward being—why is it, I say, that these strong emotions I have mentioned should not take advantage of this strange river flowing to and fro between the conceptional and the visual to float before us for a time, and give us an opportunity of seeing and touching them who influence our every action in life?

“Nay, I will go further, and insist that my theory has a right to at least be admitted to serious discussion and investigation, for the greatest men since the death of Christ have founded their whole theory of life upon the

unseen, the purely conceptional. 'Faith is the evidence of things unseen,' as the abbé here knows well; and how terribly material have been the sacrifices made for this splendid conception! Why, then, should not a man like Loyola, for instance, have been able to really see with his earthly eyes, under certain given conditions of nervous excitement, what he was ready to sacrifice his very material body, nerves, blood, and sinews, to pay due homage to? The media through which these great conceptional realities may become tangible and corporealised should, to my mind, be thoroughly tested and examined through the lens of science before we can reject as absurd the possibility of their being so materialised.

"*Bref*, it is my belief that I can shake hands with my emotions; that Regret or Remorse, for instance, can become tangible and pinch my ears, and slap me on the back, just as surely as they can and do keep people awake at night by agitating their nervous system, or in other words, by mentally pinching their ears."

"That is certainly a very fantastic idea, Octave," said the abbé, smiling. "But if you have seen any of your emotions, what do they look like? I should like to see my hasty temper sitting beside me for a minute: I should take advantage of his being materialised to pay him

back in his own coin, and give him a good thrashing."

"It is difficult," said the duke gravely, "to recognise one's emotions when brought actually face to face with them, as it were, although they have been living in us all our lives,—turning our hair grey or pulling it out,—making us stout or lean, upright or bent over. Moreover, our minor emotions, except when the medium is remarkably powerful, often outwardly express themselves to us in some unrecognisable form, sometimes as perfumes and flowers, often as mere luminous bodies. I have reason, however, to believe that I have recognised that most complex of emotions—my conscience."

"I should have thought he'd have been too sleepy to move out," laughed the abbé.

"That just shows how wrongly one man judges another," said Octave lazily, without earnestness, but with a certain something in his tone that betokened he was dealing with realities. "You very probably think that I am not much troubled with a conscience, whereas the fact is that my conscience, with a strong dash of remorse in it, is a very keen one. Many years ago a certain episode changed the whole colour and current of my life inwardly and to myself, although, of course, outwardly I was much the same. Now this episode of which I speak

aroused what I am pleased to call my conscience"—bowing to the abbé—"to a most extraordinary degree; and since that catastrophe, which changed the whole tenor of my life, I have never taken part in a séance of spiritualism without seeing a female figure with a face like that of the heroine of my episode, dressed in a queer strange robe, woven of every possible colour save white, who shudders and trembles as she passes before me, holding in her arms large sheets of glass, through which dim Bohemian-glass colours pass flickering every moment."

"What a very disagreeable thing to see this weather!" said the abbé; "everything shuddering and shaking."

"Have you ever discovered why she goes about like the wife of a glazier?" asked the prince.

"For a long time I could not make out what they could be, these large panes of glass, with variegated colours passing through them, but now I think I know."

"Well?"

"They are dreams waiting to be fitted in."

CHAPTER IV

“BRAVO!” cried the abbé; “that is really a good idea! If I only had the pen of Charles Nodier, what a charming *feuilleton* I could write about all this!”

Pomerantseff laid his hand affectionately on the duke’s shoulder. “*Mon cher ami*,” he said, with a grave smile, “believe me, you are wholly at fault in your speculations. Girod here, of course (naturally enough, since he has never been willing enough to attend an ordinary séance of spiritualism), thinks we are both madmen, and that the whole thing is folly; but you and I, who have been to very many extraordinary séances, and have seen very many marvellous manifestations, know that it is not folly. Take the word of a man who has had greater experience in the matter than yourself, and who is himself a most powerful materialising medium, as you know: the theory you have just enunciated is utterly false.”

“Prove that it is false.”

“I cannot prove it, but wait and see.”

“Nay; I have given it all up now. I will not meddle with spiritualism again. It unhinged my nerves and destroyed my peace of mind while I was investigating it.”

The prince shrugged his shoulders.

"Prince, leave him alone," said the abbé, smiling; "his theory is a great deal more sensible than yours; and if I could bring myself to believe that at your séances any real phenomenon *does* take place (which of course no sane person can), I should be rather inclined to accept Octave's interpretation of the matter.

"Let us follow it out a little further, for the mere sake of talking nonsense. 'Qui vit sans folie n'est pas si sage qu'il croit!' Doubtless the dominant passion of a man would be the most likely to appear—that is to say, would be the most tangible?"

"That," replied the duke, "would depend upon circumstances. If the phenomenon should take place while the man is alone, doubtless it would be so; but if while at a séance, attended by many people, the apparition would be the product of the master-passions of all: and thus it is that many of the visions which appear at séances, when the sitters are not harmonised, are often most remarkable and unrecognisable anomalies."

"I thought I understood from Madame de Girardin that certain spirits always appeared."

"Pooh, pooh! Madame de Girardin never went deep enough into the matter. The most ravishing vision I ever saw was when I fancied I saw Love."

"What? Love! An emanation from yourself?"

The duke sighed.

"Ah! that is what proved to me that what I saw could not be Love. That sentiment has been too long dormant in me to awaken to a corporeal expression."

"What made you think it was Love?" asked Pomerantseff.

"It was a white dove, with something, I cannot express in words, that was human about it. I felt ineffably happy while it was with me."

"Your theory is false, I tell you!" said the Russian; "what you saw probably was Love."

"Then it would have been God!" cried the abbé.

"Why?"

"I believe with Novalis that 'Love is the highest reality,'" replied Girod; and then, breaking forth into a laugh, he sang, pirouetting on his heel—

"La prospérité s'en vole,
Le pouvoir tombe et s'enfuit;
Un peu d'amour qui console
Vaut mieux et fait moins de bruit."

"Don't quote Hugo to me about love, abbé, I beg of you, for he knew nothing about it, any more than he understood a word of English,

although he coolly wrote a whole volume of criticism on Shakespeare."¹

"Where is the soul when the body is asleep?" asked the Muscovy prince.

"No, duke!" cried the abbé, laughing, and not heeding Pomerantseff's pregnant question; "what you saw was not Love, but it might all the same have been an emanation from yourself—a master-passion. I daresay it was the corporeal embodiment of your love of pigeon-shooting."

"Perhaps," laughed the duke.

"I tell you what, *mon ami*," said Pomerantseff, rising, as he saw the abbé making preparations to depart, "I am glad that my appetite, corporealised and separated from my discretion, is not in your wine-cellar—your Johannisberg would suffer!"

"Prince, you must drive me home," said the abbé. "I cannot get into a draughty cab at this hour of the night."

¹ I have now lying before me one among the very numerous letters which the great poet did me the honour to address to me, bearing date 20th October 1879, in which occur the following words: " Je ne sais pas l'anglais mais votre lettre noble et charmante m'emeut et je me ferai lire très prochainement votre article ou je retrouverai la délicatesse de votre esprit et l'élévation de votre talent," and so forth and so on. This will, I hope, put an end to the controversy as to whether or not the author of "William Shakespeare" understood English, for I am quite ready to produce the letter in question.—THE AUTHOR.

“*Très volontiers.* Good-night, duke. Remember to-morrow morning at half-past nine at the Gare de Lyon,” said the prince.

“Remember to-morrow night at half-past ten at Madame de Langeac’s!” bawled the abbé; and so they left.

The priest hurried down the cold staircase and into the prince’s brougham.

“What a pity,” exclaimed the abbé, when they were once fairly started, “that a man with the brains of De Frontignan should give himself up to such wild ideas and dreams!”

“You are very complimentary,” rejoined the other, smiling gravely; “for you know that, so far as believing in spirits is concerned, I am as bad, if not worse, than he is.”

“Ah, but *you* are jesting.”

“On my honour as a gentleman, I am not jesting. See here,”—as he spoke Pomerantseff seized the abbé’s hand,—“you heard me tell the duke just now that I believed he had seen the spirit of Love. Well, the sermon you preached the day before yesterday, which all Paris is talking about, and in which you endeavoured to prove the personality of the devil to be a fact, was more true than perhaps you believed when you preached it. Why should not Frontignan have seen the spirit of Love, *when I know and have seen the devil?*”

"*Mon ami*, you are insane!" cried Girod. "Why, the devil does not exist!"

"I tell you I have seen him—the god of all evil, the prince of desolation!" cried the other, in an excited voice; "and what is more, *I will show him to you!*"

"Show the devil to *me!*" exclaimed the abbé, half terrified, half amused. "Why, you are out of your mind!"

The prince laid his other hand upon the arm of the abbé, who could feel he was trembling with excitement.

"You know my address," he said, in a quick, passionate voice. "When you feel—as I tell you you will surely feel—desirous of investigating this further, send for me, and I promise, on my honour as a gentleman, to show you the devil, so that you cannot doubt. I will do this only on one condition."

The abbé felt almost faint, for apart from the wildness of the words thus abruptly and unexpectedly addressed to him, the hand of the prince, which lay upon his own, as if to keep him still, seemed to be pouring fire and madness into him.

He tried to withdraw it, but the other grasped the fingers tight.

"On one condition," repeated Pomerantseff, in a lower tone.

“What condition?” murmured the poor abbé.

“That you trust yourself entirely to me until we reach the place of meeting.”

“Prince, let go my hand! You are hurting me! I will promise to do as you say when I want to go to your infernal meeting, which will be never.”

He wrenched his hand away, pulled down the carriage-window, and let the cold night air in.

“Pomerantseff, you are a madman: you are really dangerous. Why the devil did you grasp my hand in that way?—my arm is numb.”

The prince laughed.

“It is only electricity. I was determined, since you doubted the existence of the devil, to make you promise to come and see him.”

“I never promised!” exclaimed the abbé. “I only promised to trust myself to you if the horrible desire should ever seize me to investigate your mad words further. But you need not be afraid of that. God forbid I should indulge in such folly!”

The prince smiled.

“God has nothing to do with this,” he remarked simply. “You will come.”

The carriage had turned up the street in which the abbé lived, and they were within but a few doors of his house.

“My dear prince,” said Girod earnestly, “let me say a few words to you at parting. You know that I am not a bigot, so that your words—which many might think blasphemous—I care nothing about; but remember we are in the Paris of the nineteenth century, not in the Paris of Cazotte, and that we are eminently practical nowadays. Had you asked me to go with you to see some curious atrocity, no matter how horrible, I might, were it interesting, have accepted; but when you invite me to go with you to see the devil, you really must excuse me: it is too absurd.”

“Very well,” replied Prince Pomerantseff, “of course I know you will come; but think the matter over well. Remember, I promise to show the devil to you so that you can never doubt of his personality again. This is not one of the wonders of electro-biology, but simply a fact: *the devil exists, and you shall see him.* Good-night.”

CHAPTER V

GIROD, as he turned into his *porte cochère* and made his way upstairs, was more struck than perhaps he confessed even to himself, by the quiet tone of certainty and assurance in

which the prince uttered these words; and on reaching his apartment he sat down by the blazing fire, lighted a cigarette, and began calmly considering in all its bearings what he could hardly bring himself to believe to be other than a most remarkable and extraordinary case of mania and mental derangement.

In the first place, was the prince deceived himself, or merely endeavouring to deceive others? The latter theory he at once rejected. Not only the character and breeding of the man, but his nervous earnestness about this matter, rendered such a supposition impossible.

Then he himself was deceived: and yet, how improbable! Girod could remember nothing in what he knew or had heard of the prince that could lead him to suppose his brain was of the kind charlatans and pseudo-magicians can successfully bewitch.

On the contrary, although native of a country in which the grossest superstitions are rife, he himself had led such an active healthy life, partly in Russia, partly in France, and partly in England, that his brain could hardly be suspected of derangement; for an intimate and practical acquaintance with most of the fences in "the Shires," and all the leading statesmen of Europe, can hardly be considered compatible with a morbid disposition and superstitious nature.

No; the abbé was forced to confess to himself on reflection that the man who deceived Pomerantseff must have been of no ordinary ability. That he had been deceived was of course beyond all question, but it was certainly most marvellous. In practical matters, the abbé was even forced to confess to himself he would unhesitatingly take the prince's advice sooner than trust to his own private judgment; and yet here was this model of keen, healthy wisdom gravely inviting him to meet the devil face to face, and not only this, but assuring him, moreover, that it should be no unintelligible freak of electro-biology, but as a simple fact.

Girod smoked thirty cigarettes without coming to any satisfactory solution of the enigma.

What if, after all, he, the Abbé Girod, for once should abandon the line of conduct he had laid down for himself, and to satisfy his curiosity, and perhaps with the chance of restoring to its proper equilibrium a most valuable and comprehensive mind, overlook his determination never to endanger his peace of mind by meddling with the affairs of spiritualists?

He could picture to himself the whole thing. They would doubtless be in a darkened room; an apparition clothed in red, and adorned with the traditional horns, would duly make its appearance, and there would of course very likely

be no apparent evidence of fraud. That the farce would be cleverly played the abbé did not doubt for a moment. Even supposing some portion of the absurd theory enunciated by Frontignan to be true, and some strange thing, begotten of electric fluid and overwrought imagination, were to make its appearance, that could hardly be considered by a sane man as being equivalent to an interview with the devil.

The abbé told himself that it would be most likely impossible to *detect* any fraud; but he felt convinced that, should the prince find this phenomenon ridiculed and laughed to scorn, after a full investigation by a man of sense and culture, his faith in it would be shaken, and ere long he would come himself to despise it.

All the remarkable stories he had heard about spiritualism from Madame de Girardin and others, and which he had hitherto paid no heed to, came back to-night to the abbé as he sat ruminating over the extraordinary offer just made him.

He had heard of dead people appearing, and that was sufficiently absurd—for he did not believe in a future life; but the devil—the idea was preposterous! Poor Luther indeed might throw his ink-pot at him; but no enlightened Roman Catholic priest could in these latter nineteenth-century days be expected to believe

in his existence, no matter how much he might be forced, for obvious reasons, to preach about it, and represent it as a fact in sermons.

Yes; he would unhesitatingly consent to investigate the matter, and discover and lay bare the fraud he felt certain was lurking somewhere, but that the prince seemed to feel so provokingly certain of his consent, and he feared by thus fulfilling an idly-expressed prophecy, to plunge the unhappy man still deeper into his slough of superstition.

One thing was certain, the abbé told himself with a smile, nothing on earth or from heaven or hell—if the two latter absurdities existed—could bring *him* to believe in the devil. No, not even if the devil should come and take him by the hand, and all the hosts of heaven flock to testify to his identity.

By this time, having smoked and thought himself into a state of blasphemous idiocy, our worthy divine threw away his cigarette, went to bed, and read himself into a nightmare with a volume of Von Helmont.

The following morning still found him perplexed as to what course to adopt in this matter.

As luck (or shall we say the devil?) would have it, while he was trifling in a listless way with his breakfast, there called to see him the

only priest in whose judgment, purity, and religious conviction he had any confidence. It is probable, to such an extent was his mind engrossed by the subject, that no matter who might have called just then, he would have discussed the extraordinary conduct of Prince Pomerantseff with him; but inasmuch as the visitor chanced to be the very best man calculated to direct his judgment in the matter, he, without unnecessary delay, laid the whole affair before him.

“You see, *mon cher*,” said the abbé, in conclusion, “my position is just this: it appears to me that this person, whom I will not name, has been trifled with by Home and other so-called spiritualists, to such an extent that his mind is really in danger. Now, although, of course, we are forbidden to have any dealings with such people, or to participate in their infamous, foolish, and unholy practices, surely it would be the act of a Christian if a clear, healthy-minded man were to expose the fraud, and thus save to society a man of such transcendent ability as my friend. Moreover, should I decide to accept his mad invitation, I hardly think I could be said to participate in any of the scandalous, and perhaps even blasphemous, rites he may have to perform to bring about the supposed result. What do you think, and what do you advise?”

His friend walked up and down the room for a few minutes, turning the matter over carefully in his mind, and then, coming up to where the abbé lay lazily stretched upon a lounge, he said earnestly—

“*Mon cher* Henri, I am very glad you have asked me about this. It appears to me that your duty is quite clear. You perhaps have it in your power, as you yourself have seen, to save, not only as you say a *mind*, but what I wish I could feel you prized more highly, a *soul*. You must accept the invitation.

The abbé rose in delight at having found another man who, taking the responsibility off his shoulders, commanded him as a duty to indulge his ardent curiosity.

“But,” continued the other in a solemn voice, “before accepting the invitation you must do one thing.”

The abbé threw himself back on the lounge in disgust.

“Oh, pray for strength, of course,” he exclaimed petulantly; “I am quite aware of that.”

“Not only pray, but *fast*, and that for seven days at least, my dear brother.”

This was a very disagreeable view of the matter; but the abbé was equal to the occasion.

After a pause, during which he appeared

absorbed in religious reflection, he rose, and taking his friend by the hand—

“You are right,” said he, “as you always are. Although, of course, I know the evil spirit cannot harm an officer of God’s Holy Catholic Church, even supposing, for the sake of argument, my poor friend can invoke Satan, yet if I am to be of any good—if I am to save my friend from destruction, I must be armed with extraordinary grace, and this, as you truly divine, can only come by fasting.”

The other wrung his hand warmly. “I knew you would see it in its proper light, my dear Henri,” he said; “and now I will leave you to recover your peace of mind by religious meditation.”

The abbé smiled gravely, and his friend departed.

The following letter was the result of this edifying interview between the two divines:—

“MON CHER PRINCE,—No doubt you will feel very triumphant when you learn that my object in writing this is to accept your most kind offer of presentation to Sa Majesté; but I do not care whether you choose to consider this yielding to what is only in part whimsical curiosity a triumph or no.

“I will not write to you any cut and dried

platitudes about good and evil, but I frankly assure you that one of the strongest reasons which induces me to go on this fool's errand is a belief that I can discover the absurdity and imposture, and cure you of a hallucination which is unworthy of you.—*Tout à vous,*

“HENRI GIROD.”

For two days he received no reply to this letter, nor did he happen to meet the prince in society in the interval, although he heard of him from De Frontignan and others; but on the third day the following note was brought to him:—

“MON CHER AMI,—There is no question of triumph any more than there is of deception. I will call for you this evening at half-past nine. You must remember your promise to trust yourself entirely to me.—*Cordialement à vous,*

“POMERANTSEFF.”

So the matter was now arranged, and he, the Abbé Girod, the renowned preacher of the celebrated — Church, was to meet that very night by special appointment, at half-past nine, the prince of darkness; and this in January, in Paris, at the height of the season, in the capital of civilisation—*la ville Lumière!*

CHAPTER VI

AS may be well imagined, during the remainder of that eventful day until the hour of the prince's arrival, the abbé did not enjoy his customary placidity.

A secretary of the Turkish Embassy who called at four found him engaged in a violent discussion with one of the Rothschilds about the belief held by the early Christians in demons, as shown by Tertullian and others; while Lord Middlesex, who called at half-past five, found he had captured Faure, installed him at the piano, and was inducing him to hum snatches from *Don Juan*.

When his dinner-hour arrived, having given orders to his valet to admit no one lest he should be discovered *not* fasting, he hastily swallowed a few mouthfuls, fortified himself with a couple of glasses of *Chartreuse verte*, and lighting a Henry Clay, awaited the coming of the messenger of Satan.

At half-past nine o'clock precisely the prince arrived. He was in full evening dress, but—contrary to his usual custom—wearing no ribbon or decoration, and his face was of a deadly pallor."

"*Mon Dieu!*" exclaimed the abbé, "what is

the matter with you, prince? You are looking very ill; we had better postpone our visit."

"No; it is nothing," said the prince gravely. "Let us be off without delay. In matters of this kind waiting is unendurable."

The abbé rose, and rang the bell for his hat and cloak. The appearance of the prince, his evident agitation, and his unfeigned impatience, which seemed to betoken terror, were far from reassuring; but the abbé promptly quelled any feelings of misgiving he might have felt. Suddenly a thought struck him—a thought which certainly his brain would never have engendered had it been in its normal condition.

"Perhaps I had better change my dress and go *en pékin*?" he inquired anxiously.

The ghost of a sarcastic smile flitted across the prince's face as he replied, "No, certainly not; your *soutane* will be in every way acceptable. Come, let us be off."

The abbé made a grimace, put on his hat, flung his cloak around his shoulders, and followed the prince downstairs.

He remarked, with some surprise, that the carriage awaiting them was not the prince's.

"I have hired a carriage for the occasion," said Pomerantseff quietly, noticing Girod's glance of surprise. "I am unwilling that my servants should suspect anything of this."

They entered the carriage, and the coachman, evidently instructed beforehand where to go, drove off without delay. The prince immediately pulled down the blinds, and taking a silk pocket-handkerchief from his pocket, began quietly to fold it lengthwise.

"I must blindfold you, *mon cher*," he remarked simply, as if announcing the most ordinary fact.

"*Diable!*" cried the abbé, now becoming a little nervous. "This is very unpleasant; I like to see where I am going. I believe, Pomerantseff, you are the devil yourself."

"Remember your promise," said the prince, as he carefully covered his friend's eyes with the pocket-handkerchief, and effectually precluded the possibility of his seeing anything until he should remove the bandage.

After this nothing was said. The abbé heard the prince pull up the blind, open the window, and tell the coachman to drive faster. He endeavoured to discover when they turned to the right, and when to the left, but in a few minutes got bewildered, and gave it up in despair. At one time he felt certain they were crossing the river.

"I wish I had not come," he murmured to himself. "Of course the whole thing is folly; but it is a great trial to the nerves, and I shall probably be upset for many days."

On they drove : the time seemed interminable to the abbé.

“Are we near our destination yet?” he inquired at last.

“Not very far off now,” replied the other, in what seemed to Girod a most sepulchral tone of voice.

At length, after a drive of about half an hour, which seemed to the abbé double that time, Pomerantseff murmured in a low tone, and with a profound sigh, which sounded almost like a sob, “Here we are”; and at that moment the abbé felt the carriage was turning, and heard the horses’ hoofs clatter on what he imagined to be the stones of a courtyard.

The carriage stopped, Pomerantseff opened the door himself, and assisted the blindfolded priest to alight.

“There are five steps,” he said, as he held the abbé by the arm. “Take care!”

The abbé stumbled up the five steps. They had now entered a house, and Girod imagined to himself it was probably some old hotel like the Hôtel Pimodan, where Gautier, Baudelaire, and others at one time were wont to resort to disperse the cares of life in the fumes of opium. When they had proceeded a few yards, Pomerantseff warned him that they were about to ascend a staircase, and up many shallow steps they went, the abbé regretting every instant more and more

that he had allowed his vulgar curiosity to lead him into an adventure which could be productive of nothing but ridicule and shattered nerves.

When at length they had reached the top of the stairs, the prince guided him by the arm through what the abbé imagined to be a hall, opened a door, closed and locked it after them, walked on again, opened another door, which he closed and locked likewise, and over which the abbé heard him pull a heavy curtain. The prince then took him again by the arm, advanced him a few steps, and said in a low whisper—

“Remain quietly standing where you are. I rely upon your honour not to attempt to remove the pocket-handkerchief from your eyes until you hear voices.”

The abbé folded his arms and stood motionless, while he heard the prince walk away, and then suddenly all sound ceased.

It was evident to the unfortunate priest that the room in which he stood was not dark; for although he could of course see nothing owing to the pocket-handkerchief, which had been bound most skilfully over his eyes, there was a sensation of being in strong light, and his cheeks and hands felt, as it were, illuminated.

Suddenly a horrible sound sent a chill of terror through him—a gentle noise as of naked flesh touching the waxed floor—and before he

could recover from the shock occasioned by the sound, the voices of many men—voices of men groaning or wailing in some hideous ecstasy—broke the stillness, crying—

“Father and creator of all sin and crime, prince and king of all despair and anguish! come to us, we implore thee!”

The abbé, wild with terror, tore off the pocket-handkerchief.

He found himself in a large old-fashioned room, panelled up to the lofty ceiling with oak, and filled with great light shed from innumerable tapers fitted into sconces on the wall—light which, though by its nature soft, was almost fierce by reason of its greatness and intensity, proceeded from these countless tapers.

He had then been, after all, right in his conjectures: he was evidently in a chamber of some one of the many old-fashioned hotels which are to be seen still in the Ile Saint Louis, and indeed in all the antiquated parts of Paris. It was reassuring, at all events, to know one was not in the infernal regions, and to feel tolerably certain that a *sergent de ville* could not be many yards distant.

All this passed into his comprehension like a flash of lightning, for hardly had the bandage left his eyes ere his whole attention was riveted upon the group before him.

Twelve men—Pomerantseff among the number

—of all ages from five-and-twenty to fifty-five, all dressed in evening dress, and all, so far as one could judge at such a moment, men of culture and refinement, lay nearly prone upon the floor with hands linked.

They were bowing forward and kissing the floor—which might account for the strange sound heard by Girod—and their faces were illuminated with a light of hellish ecstasy, half distorted, as if in pain, half smiling, as if in triumph.

The abbé's eyes instinctively sought out the prince.

He was the last on the left-hand side, and while his left hand grasped that of his neighbour, his right was sweeping nervously over the bare waxed floor, as if seeking to animate the boards. His face was more calm than those of the others, but of a deadly pallor, and the violet tints about the mouth and temples showed he was suffering from intense emotion.

They were all, each after his own fashion, praying aloud, or rather moaning, as they writhed in ecstatic adoration.

“O Father of evil! come to us!”

“O Prince of endless desolation! who sittest by the beds of suicides, we adore thee!”

“O Creator of eternal anguish!”

“O King of cruel pleasures and famishing desires! we worship thee!”

“Come to us, thy foot upon the hearts of widows!”

“Come to us, thy hair lurid with the slaughter of innocence!”

“Come to us, thy brow wreathed with the clinging chaplet of despair!”

“Come to us!”

The heart of the abbé turned cold and sick as these beings, hardly human by reason of their great mental exaltation, swayed before him, and as the air, charged with a subtle and overwhelming electricity, seemed to throb as from the echo of innumerable voiceless harps.

Suddenly—or rather, the full conception of the fact was sudden, for the influence had been gradually stealing over him—he felt a terrible coldness, a coldness more piercing than any he had ever before experienced even in Russia, and with the coldness there came to him the certain knowledge of the presence of some new being in the room.

Withdrawing his eyes from the semicircle of men, who did not seem to be aware of his, the abbé's, presence, and who ceased not in their blasphemies, he turned them slowly around, and as he did so they fell upon a newcomer, a Thirteenth, who seemed to spring into existence from the air, and before his very eyes.

CHAPTER VII

HE was a young man of apparently twenty, tall, as beardless as the young Augustus, with bright golden hair falling from his forehead like a girl's.

He was dressed in evening dress, and his cheeks were flushed as if with wine or pleasure; but from his eyes there gleamed a look of inexpressible sadness, of intense despair.

The group of men had evidently become aware of his presence at the same moment, for they all fell prone upon the floor adoring, and their words were now no longer words of invocation, but words of praise and worship.

The abbé was frozen with horror: there was no room in his breast for the lesser emotion of fear; indeed, the horror was so great and all-absorbing as to charm him and hold him spell-bound.

He could not remove his eyes from the Thirteenth, who stood before him calmly, a faint smile playing over his intellectual and aristocratic face—a smile which only added to the intensity of the despair gleaming in his clear blue eyes.

Girod was struck first with the sadness, then

with the beauty, and then with the intellectual vigour, of that marvellous countenance.

The expression was not unkind or even cold ; haughtiness and pride might indeed be read in the high-bred features, shell-like sensitive nostrils, and short upper lip ; while the exquisite symmetry and perfect proportions of his figure showed suppleness and steel-like strength : for the rest, the face betokened, save for the flush upon the cheeks, only great sadness.

The eyes were fixed upon those of Girod, and he felt their soft, subtle, intense light penetrate into every nook and cranny of his soul and being. This terrible Thirteenth simply stood and gazed upon the priest, as the worshippers grew more wild, more blasphemous, more cruel.

The abbé could think of nothing but the face before him, and the great desolation that lay folded over it as a veil. He could think of no prayer, although he could remember there were prayers.

Was this Despair—the Despair of a man drowning in sight of land—being shed into him from the sad blue eyes ? Was it Despair or was it Death ?

Ah no, not Death !—Death was peaceful, and this was violent and passionate.

Was there no refuge, no mercy, no salvation anywhere ? Perhaps, nay, surely ; but while

those sad blue eyes still gazed upon him, the sadness, as it seemed to him, intensifying every moment, he could not remember where to seek for and where to find such refuge, such mercy, such salvation. He could not remember, and yet he could not entirely forget. He felt that help would come to him if he sought it, and yet he could hardly tell how to seek it.

Moreover, by degrees the blue eyes—it seemed as if their colour, their great blueness, had some fearful power—began pouring into him some more hideous pleasure. It was the ecstasy of great pain becoming a delight, the ecstasy of being beyond all hope, and of being thus enabled to look with scorn upon the Author of hope. And all the while the blue eyes still gazed sadly, with a soft smile breathing overwhelming despair upon him.

Girod knew that in another moment he would not sink, faint, or fall, but that he would,—oh! much worse!—he would smile!

At this very instant a name—a familiar name, and one which the infernal worshippers had made frequent use of, but which he had never remarked before—struck his ear: the name of Christ.

Where had he heard it? He could not tell. It was the name of a young man; he could remember that and nothing more.

Again the name sounded, "Christ."

There was another word like Christ, which seemed at some time to have brought an idea first of great suffering and then of great peace.

Ay, peace, but no pleasure. No delight like this shed from those marvellous blue eyes.

Again the name sounded, "Christ."

Ah! the other word was cross—*croix*—he remembered now; a long thing with a short thing across it.

Was it that as he thought of these things the charm of the blue eyes and their great sadness lessened in intensity? We dare not say; but as some faint conception of what a cross was flitted through the abbé's brain, although he could think of no prayer—nay, of no distinct use of this cross—he drew his right hand slowly up, for it was pinioned as by paralysis to his side, and feebly and half mechanically made the sign across his breast.

The vision vanished.

The men adoring ceased their clamour and lay crouched up one against another, as if some strong electric power had been taken from them and great weakness had succeeded, while, at the same time, the throbbing of the thousand voiceless harps was hushed.

The pause lasted but for a moment, and then the men rose, stumbling, trembling, and with

loosened hands, and stood feebly gazing at the abbé, who felt faint and exhausted, and heeded them not. With extraordinary presence of mind the prince walked quickly up to him, pushed him out of the door by which they had entered, followed him, and locked the door behind them, thus precluding the possibility of being immediately pursued by the others.

Once in the adjoining room, the abbé and Pomerantseff paused for an instant to recover breath, for the swiftness of their flight had exhausted them, worn out as they both were mentally and physically ; but during this brief interval the prince, who appeared to be retaining his presence of mind by a purely mechanical effort, carefully replaced over his friend's eyes the bandage which the abbé still held tightly grasped in his hand. Then he led him on, and it was not till the cold air struck them that they noticed that they had left their hats behind.

"*N'importe !*" muttered Pomerantseff. "It would be dangerous to return ;" and hurrying the abbé into the carriage which awaited them, he bade the coachman speed them away—" *au grand galop !*"

Not a word was spoken ; the abbé lay back as one in a swoon, and heeded nothing until he felt the carriage stop, and the prince uncovered

his eyes and told him he had reached home ; then he alighted in silence, and passed into his house without a word.

How he reached his apartment he never knew ; but the following morning found him raging with fever, and delirious.

When he had sufficiently recovered, after the lapse of a few days, to admit of his reading the numerous letters awaiting his attention, one was put into his hand which had been brought on the second night after the one of the memorable séance.

It ran as follows :—

“ JOCKEY CLUB, *January 26, 18—.*

“ MON CHER ABBÉ,—I am afraid our little adventure was too much for you—in fact, I myself was very unwell all yesterday, and nothing but a Turkish bath has pulled me together. I can hardly wonder at this, however, for I have never in my life been present at so powerful a séance, and you may comfort yourself with the reflection that Sa Majesté has never honoured anyone with his presence for so long a space of time before.

“ Never fear, *mon cher*, about your illness. It is purely nervous exhaustion, and you will be well soon ; but such evenings must not often be indulged in if you are not desirous of shortening

your life. I shall hope to meet you at Mme. de Metternich's on Monday.—*Tout à vous,*

“POMERANTSEFF.”

Whether or no Girod was sufficiently recovered to meet his friend at the Austrian Embassy on the evening named we do not know, nor does it concern us ; but he is certainly enjoying excellent health now, and is no less charming and amusing than before his extraordinary adventure.

Such is the true story of a meeting with the devil in Paris not many years ago—a story true in every particular, as can be easily proved by a direct application to any of the persons concerned in it, for they are all living still.

The key to the enigma we cannot find, for we certainly do not put faith in any one of the theories of spiritualists ; but that an apparition, such as we have described, did appear in the way and under the circumstances we have related is a fact, and we must leave the satisfactory solution of the difficulty to more profound psychologists than ourselves.

A WALTZ OF CHOPIN



“*Stephen*—I shall be bold I warrant you. Have you a stool there to be melancholy upon?”—

Every Man in his Humour.



CHAPTER I

IT is, I think, delightful to avoid every now and then the epidemic of compulsory joviality which is invariably prevalent at the Christmas season, to occasionally abstain from commemorating, as is our wont, the visit of the Dayspring from on high by an excessive indulgence in the gross appetites of the flesh; and, at a season like the one in question, when conviviality becomes aggressive and a burden, to retire and refresh one's soul in a bath of solitude; for I believe, with the great Italian pessimist: “*Di modo che la solitudine fa quasi l'ufficio della gioventu; o certo ringiovanisce l'animo, ravvalora e rimette in opera l'immaginazione, e rinnova nell'uomo esperimentalo i beneficii di quella prima inesperienza che tu sospiri.*”

One evening not many years ago I found myself in Paris, about ten days before Christmas Day, alone, and so completely had I abandoned myself to the melancholy thoughts which were partly, I hope, inspired by the solemn lessons of the season, and partly occasioned by the host of sad memories which must inevitably assail one who revisits alone scenes hallowed by the spirit of the days that are no more, that I had listened to the strange suggestion of the sempiternal Ernest (who doubtless read my familiar face as a book), and so found myself dining quite alone in that celebrated chamber of the Café Anglais known as "le Grand Seize." Alone, said I? Nay, not alone. The room was crowded with the phantoms of gay, graceful, witty revellers who had come back across the Stygian River, forgetting the terrible secrets they had had revealed to them, leaving the realms of desolation to troop in and keep me company in the capital of pleasure, and drink one more last glass of St. Marceaux *à la santé des belles*. There is Barucci, *élégante* as usual, and looking none the worse for her visit to the Plutonian shore, teasing "le Duc Darling," whose harsh voice vies with the guttural, husky tones of poor "Citron" in discordancy; and Anna Deslion, breaking in with ironical epigrams, learnt like a poll-parrot from Plon Plon; while Paul Demidoff, handsomer

than ever to-night and nodding across the table to Narischkine, recites with sardonic glee, Louis Bouilhet's farewell to his sweetheart—

“Et maintenant, adieu ! Suis ton chemin, je passe :
Poudre d'un blanc discret les rougeurs de ton front ;
Le banquet est fini,—quand j'ai vidé ma tasse,
S'il reste encore du vin, les laquais le boiront !”

which brutal lines so distress Leontine Massin as to melt her to tears. But here the ghost of old Strahan breaks in : “We must not forget,” he says, removing that most obnoxious pipe from his mouth for a moment, “that to-morrow night we are all due at the Bouffes to see Cora appear as Cupidon, the God of Love,—*flammis armatus et arcu*,—I myself am dining with Angus at the Petit Moulin Rouge !” and so my vision vanished, even as a *petit verre* of the *fine Champagne des Alliés* touched my lips. Gone ! like the shade of Protesilaus these phantoms had departed, and I was alone in the Grand Seize with my cigar and the sparkling wood-fire, while from without came upon my ears the ceaseless clamour of boulevard life, the same yesterday, to-day, and to-morrow ; the noise of the revolving wheels of the great mill of pleasure into which is cast youth, beauty, rank, wit, riches, honour, purity, and hope, and which returns to us in lieu of these—ashes and worse than ashes !

But it was getting late—my ghosts had been

such good company that I had forgotten to take count of time, and it was eleven ; so, deciding to take a bath of fresh air and a glimpse of humanity after my long draught of dreams, I rang and departed, wondering as I passed the lodge whether the Great Reaper in some idle moment had perchance thought it worth his while to gather even Isabelle into his sheaf. It was a grand night, frosty and very cold, but the moon was up and flooding the gay, crowded streets with silvery beams. The shops were all ablaze with light even at that late hour, for the Christmas and New Year's presents were on exhibition, and so, anxious to see something of the joy of those buying what would give pleasure to those they loved, I strolled up the Boulevard, stopping to look into every other shop-window, and then crossed over and went into the Passage Jouffroy. Being fond of children, I am of course fond of toys, and so my steps naturally, and almost without my knowing it, led me to the famous toy-shop in the passage in question, a shop which may be easily recognised from afar, by reason of the immense indiarubber elephant which swings clumsily over its portal. As I approached I could see there was a crowd before the window, and indeed so brisk was the trade being done that the door, notwithstanding the cold weather, had of a necessity to remain open

to permit those going in and those coming out to do so without delay or inconvenience. Skirting the crowd, I paused for a moment before the shop-window; but then deciding within myself that the few purchases I had intended making could probably be made with less discomfort early the following morning, I was about to stroll on when my attention was suddenly arrested by the sight of a youth, child, or man (I could not at first exactly tell which he was), who came running up by my side, and who then, after having paused and raised himself up on tiptoe—for he was very short—in order to catch a glimpse of the toys which the surging mob prevented him from seeing, began pushing his way with feverish anxiety and careless impetuosity through the compact crowd to reach the window. What impulse prompted me to stop I cannot say. I hate a crowd, and here was a very large and very unfragrant, albeit good-natured, concourse of people; I detest and fear draughts, and now the wind came careering up the passage, asthma vaulting over bronchitis in wheezy joy, and yet I stayed. I wanted to see the face belonging to that strange, stunted figure which I had now, indeed, altogether lost sight of, for the crowd had enveloped, hidden, and absorbed it. And this desire was followed by a languid feeling of curiosity and wonder as to

why this strange creature had been so feverishly anxious to see these toys, for there had been something in the determined way in which he had pushed his way into the crowd that suggested the impulse of a stronger sentiment than the mere idle curiosity of that most inquisitive class—the *gamin de Paris*. Perhaps, after all, he was but a thief, a pickpocket, and this struggling to get a front place at the show was but the result of a vulgar desire to relieve some wondering, gaping, stupid citizen of his purse. Just then the crowd opened, violently rent asunder, as it were, by the impetuosity of someone seeking egress, and the mysterious little individual who had been occupying my thoughts emerged, greeted, as he fought his way through the mob, with many angry remarks, not unadorned with imprecations. I could see his face plainly now, but whether it belonged to a child, prematurely old through suffering, or to a young man, I could not say, but about the ugliness and the power of the face there could be no doubt; it was that of an emaciated juvenile Danton, the leonine expression being very striking at that moment, for the countenance, deeply pitted with small-pox, was illuminated by a look of insolent joy and triumph. He fell up against me when he had at length fought his way out, and looked up, apparently about to apologise for crushing

my foot, but when his eyes met mine he said nothing, but giving vent to a deep sigh of relief he turned into the shop. The glance, however, which had met mine was so extraordinary, so full of what I can only describe as spiritual light, that I followed and stood in the doorway, listening.

“I want that doll,” I heard him say, in a tone of deep agitation, but the voice was strangely musical, in nowise resembling the husky whine of the Paris *voyou*, to which class, however, he apparently belonged. The shopman stared at him.

“Which doll?” he inquired, with a strong tinge of insolence in his manner; for the very shabby, though not exactly ragged, costume of the youth, and his pale, worn, ugly face, which would indeed have been hideous but for the light and power shed from between the red, tired eyelids, evidently had not predisposed the vendor of toys in favour of his customer. “We have many dolls here.”

“I want that one,” exclaimed the shabby youth; and turning, he pointed in an imperious fashion with his forefinger to a doll in the window, much in the same way as Danton would have denounced an enemy in the Mountain and pointed him out for sacrifice.

The shopkeeper took out the doll rather reluctantly and laid it on the counter before his strange customer. The toy was certainly a beautiful one, representing a lady dressed in

the height of fashion, the *toilette* being composed of silk, satin, velvet, and lace, the golden curls crowned with a stylish bonnet, and the tiny ears decorated with imitation gems. What in the world could such a shabby little dwarf want with such a dainty toy, I wondered, the contrast between the smiling, richly-dressed puppet and its wan, half-starved, poverty-stained purchaser being indeed very striking.

"Well," exclaimed the youth impatiently, as the man said nothing, "what are you about? I told you I'd take it; pack it up for me at once, I will take it with me now; I am in a hurry.

The man hesitated. "This doll is not a cheap one," he began, "and"—

"Pack it up for me, I tell you; do you suppose I'm not going to pay you? I know the price; I asked it a month ago—it's a hundred francs," exclaimed the shabby little Danton haughtily.

Then the man began carefully, but with very evident reluctance, to pack the doll, enveloping it in many sheets of soft paper.

"Haven't you anything prettier than that?" suddenly broke in the strange lad.

"Prettier? What do you mean?" asked the shopman sullenly.

"I mean what I say; I want some prettier paper—something gold, or silver, or red."

"We never pack our dolls in any different

paper from this, monsieur," replied the shopman, now really awed into respect by the imperious manner of this shabby young purchaser.

"Well, never mind whether you do or not, I want something better, something much better—do you hear? I'm ready to pay for it if it's more. I want gold paper and silver paper and red paper."

The man stared at the youth, but his eyes met with a glance of such stern severity that he began sullenly to obey the order given, muttering to himself the while. When the doll, swathed in the most gorgeous papers, in accordance with the expressed desire of the purchaser, had been carefully deposited, surrounded by cotton-wool, in a neat cardboard box, and the whole tied with smart ribbon, the parcel was handed over to the careworn, haggard youth, who put it eagerly under his arm and then began fumbling in his pocket—but even as he did so his sallow face turned to an ashen pallor, and an expression of anxious agony came into it which was heart-rending to behold.

"I have been robbed!" he gasped, still keeping the precious box tightly clasped under his arm, and still fumbling with wild despair in his pocket. "I have been robbed! I had six louis when I left home, and I had them when I turned

into the passage, for I stopped on the Boulevard and counted them, and now—now—they are gone!”

The shopman's face broke into a sardonic grin. “Oh! robbed of course! *Je la connais celle la!* Why, you never had six louis in your life, *petit vaurien!* What do you mean by coming in here and bothering me to make up the parcel in that absurd way, and taking up my time for nothing? Do you hear me? What do you mean? Robbed, indeed! You look like it, to be sure! Why, you're nothing better than a thief yourself! Come, give me back that parcel at once or I'll call a *sergent de ville* and have you marched off to the lock-up!” and coming from behind the counter, the fellow approached the lad in a threatening manner. The poor boy put down the parcel on the counter, and though his eyes were wet with tears, he stared the enraged shopman in the face defiantly.

“Touch me, if you dare!” he exclaimed, in a low, clear tone. At this juncture I stepped into the shop.

“Take care,” I said to the shopman. “You have no right to touch this gentleman. He has given you back your parcel, so you have nothing to complain of. He has been robbed, that is clear. Here is your money—I will take the

doll," and putting down six louis on the counter, I took up the box.

"But, monsieur,"— stammered the man.

"*Assez!*" I said. "You have got your money now and the toy is mine." Then turning to the lad, I said in my most gentle and courteous manner, "Will you come out with me, monsieur? I should like to talk with you, if you would allow me." The poor lad did not answer, but simply stared at me as one in a dream; but as I turned and passed out into the passage, he followed me in silence. When we had gone a few yards from the shop-door, I stopped short and turning to him said, "Forgive me, monsieur, for thus interfering in your private matters. But I happened to be standing by and heard and saw all. You have evidently been robbed, and the shopman insulted you most grossly."

This strange, pale-faced gnome, who might have been any age from fourteen to forty, looked at me fixedly, his luminous eyes seeming lost in wonder. "Yes, I have been robbed," he said simply and very slowly, each word sounding like a sob.

"You seemed very anxious to have this doll," I continued very gently, my whole heart going out in sympathy to this poor waif.

"Yes, monsieur, very anxious. I had saved up my money for three months to buy it."

I hesitated for a moment and then said, "I hope, monsieur, you will forgive me and not think me rude if I ask you why? It was not for yourself, I suppose?"

The lad's face flushed. "Oh no!" he exclaimed quickly. "It was not for myself"—and then he stopped abruptly, a look of shyness suddenly softening his rugged countenance.

"It was for a friend, then—for your sister or"—and I too hesitated, wondering whether the age of this strange creature would warrant my adding, "child?"

"Yes, monsieur," replied the lad slowly and in ineffable sadness. "It was for a friend—a friend who is dying." And the tears welled up to the poor, tired eyelids.

"Forgive me," I exclaimed. "I must beg of you to forgive me, monsieur. I did not mean to cause you pain."

"You've not caused me pain, monsieur," he said simply, and then added, his voice sinking to a whisper, "Nothing could cause me pain now!"

What a world of sad experience lay revealed in those few words, so terribly eloquent in their simplicity. "I am sorry to hear you say that," I rejoined, my voice re-echoing the sadness of his. "I must be old enough to be your father, for you can hardly be more than"—

"I am twenty," interrupted the lad.

"Twenty! Then you're only just beginning life."

He shook his head and then said, with a forced smile, looking at me kindly in the face, "That depends, monsieur,

'On ne vieillissait pas si vite au temps jadis,
Et l'on n'arrivait pas au jour avant l'aurore.'

What in the world had I stumbled over now, I wondered—a poet? Here was a lad almost in rags quoting Marc Monnier! But before I had had time to recover from my surprise, the youth, who had been looking at me very earnestly, exclaimed in my mother-tongue: "Are you English, monsieur?" Here was another mystery, for the lad's accent was perfect!

"Yes," I exclaimed, greatly astonished. "And you?"

"Yes," he replied, "I am an Englishman, although I was born in Paris; my father was an Englishman."

"Then we are fellow-countrymen," I exclaimed eagerly, "and we ought to be friends. Is your friend, your friend who is—who is so very ill, English too?"

The lad's face saddened again. "No—she is French."

Then I paused for a moment. "I wonder if I might ask you do me a very great favour?" I said gently.

The gnome looked at me with surprise. "A favour?" he echoed.

"Yes, a very great favour. I should have asked you in any case, but now that I know you are an Englishman like myself, I feel sure you will not misunderstand me, and will do your best to oblige me."

He looked at me rather suspiciously, changed colour, and then stammered, "What is it? I will of course do what I can."

"Then I have your promise, remember. What I want you to do is this: I only bought this doll for you, so you must take it and give it to your friend."

"Bought the doll for me?" he echoed. "Why, you don't know me!"

"Perhaps I don't, but I bought the doll for you, and you must take it," and I tried to thrust the box into his hand, but he retreated. "You must take it," I continued. "Remember your promise—you and I are fellow-countrymen and in a foreign country, and I am old enough to be your father, so you must not refuse me, *mon ami*." And again I endeavoured to thrust the box upon him.

"But I can't pay you for it,—not now at least,—I have been robbed of all my savings."

"Never mind that. I don't want the money; you shall pay me later, if you like. I will give

you my name and address and you shall send me the money when you can, but take the doll now, I beg of you—you must, my dear boy, you really must take it! Remember, it is not for you, but for your dying friend!" Then as I said these words, and again thrust forward the box, a poor, thin, emaciated little hand was raised timidly and took it.

"Thank you, sir," he said simply. "I will take it for my friend. You are very kind, but I will repay you in three months. I can save the money by that time, and I will send it to you then, if you can wait so long."

"Oh yes, my dear boy, I can wait, and for more than three months, or four, five, or twelve months. You must not trouble yourself about that."

"Then I will take it, sir," said this strange boy, "if you can wait, for my little friend is dying and death will not wait! You must give me your name and address, please, and I will give you mine. Believe me, you shall have the money back in twelve weeks, if"—and he hesitated, "if I live." Then he fumbled in his pocket, took out a soiled envelope and gave it to me. "That's my name and address," he said. "I have an absurd name, but that's not my fault—Roselin Tudor, 298 Rue St. Marc. I am a copyist; most of the authors in Paris know me; M. Dumas has been very kind to me."

“Thank you, Mr. Tudor. Here is my card ; there is no address on it, but if you write to me to the — Club, London, it will be sure to find me. In the meantime, I am staying here in Paris at the Hotel Westminster for ten days longer. I hope you will let me see something of you. I should like”—and I hesitated—“I should like you to let me be your friend.” Once again the tears mounted to those strange, luminous eyes and welled up to the poor, tired eyelids, that showed very evident tokens of work done by night.

“Thank you, sir,” he said. “You are very kind to me—but you are a gentleman and I am only a copyist.”

“Never mind,” I replied, with affected gaiety ; “you are certainly my superior in one way, for you work, whereas I, unfortunately, do nothing—except perhaps harm.”

He shook his head and smiled sadly, and then proceeded with great precision and gravity, but in a listless tone that seemed to indicate a terrible fatigue bordering on despair—“As I have taken this doll you have been kind enough to offer me, and as I am forced to keep you so long waiting before I can repay you, I must tell you why I do it.”

“No, you must not ; not if it pains you.”

“Nothing pains me ; nothing will ever pain

me any more. This doll is for a little girl who is dying. She is only seven, but she is consumptive, and the doctors have given her up. She is living with me, and just before she was taken ill—more than three months ago, now—she saw this doll. We were walking here together one morning and she saw it and wanted it—not exactly as a plaything, but”—here he paused, and then continued in a lower tone—“because it reminded her of her mother.” Then after another pause he added, “Her mother is dead.”

I said nothing.

“So I decided to save my money and buy it for her,” he continued; “of course I said nothing to her about it at first, for I was not sure of being able to save so much money, but then she fell ill, and then—and then—the doctor gave her up, and then I managed to get some extra work to do, and saw that I was certain of being able to save the money, so I told her. I told her ten days ago that she might be happy at least once before she died, and since then, every morning and every evening, we have counted up what was saved, and I have come here to make sure the doll was not yet sold. This evening I got the last five francs for a play I am copying for M. Sardou, and went home and told Marie and then came on here. You know the rest. She is waiting for me; it would break her heart if I

came back without the doll. That is why I take it."

Then came a pause. Of course I could not speak—who, indeed, could have spoken at such a moment?—but I took his hand in mine and pressed it, and he understood me.

"Is this little girl related to you?" I said at last.

He turned his head aside. "No, she is not related to me; neither she nor I have any relations—but—but—I knew her mother."

"And is there really no hope? Has she had the best medical advice? Surely if she were sent to a warm climate she might recover."

He shook his head. "No—there is no hope. She has had the best medical advice; M. Gondinet sent Dr. Potain to see her. A warm climate would be of no use now. She is far too ill for that; her time has come and she must go!" These last words came almost as a wail.

After a pause I resumed timidly—"Did she inherit this consumption from her mother, do you think?"

He turned on me quickly, almost fiercely, but on failing to recognise what he had evidently feared to read in my face, he dropped his eyes and shuddered. "No," he said, almost in a whisper, "she did not inherit it. It is trouble that has brought it on—her mother did not die of consumption."

Then after another long pause I broke the silence. "Well, I am very glad to have met you, Mr. Tudor, but I must not keep you any longer now. You must go back to her, for she will be waiting for you. Will you let me come and see you? Believe me, I shall look upon it as a great favour if you will let me come. We are both Englishmen, you know, and I might perhaps be of some service to you. I can't tell you how thankful I should be if you would only let me try to make your little friend happier while she lives."

He stretched out his hand which I grasped warmly.

"Thank you," he murmured, greatly agitated, "but you have done all already. She will want nothing more now and I want nothing. I can work."

"But you will let me come to see you?" I urged.

He hesitated and then said gravely, "No, perhaps you had better not; we have only two rooms and she is so very ill your visit might disturb her, but if you care to see me"—and he paused.

"Well, I do care to see you; tell me where and when I can."

"Do you know a little café near the corner of the Rue St. Marc, nearly opposite the stage entrance of the Opera Comique?"

"I do; when can I meet you there? Any time will suit me, late or early, but let it be to-morrow."

"To-morrow, then, at four in the afternoon."

"Good; I shall be there at half-past three and wait for you till six."

"I shan't keep you waiting, sir; I shall be there at four. And now good-bye till then. I shall not thank you, sir, again: you are giving the first joy she has known to a dying child—how can I thank you for that?" And again we clasped hands. "Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Tudor, till to-morrow. Good-bye, and God bless you!" And then we parted, and I stood still in the passage watching the stunted, frail figure of the poor boy, as he eagerly threaded his way through the gay crowd of loungers and merry-makers, clasping his precious box in his arms, and hurrying to the deathbed of a child, that haply he might be in time to bring her joy before the Great Consoler came. But I now, standing there alone, became conscious, almost for the first time, of the cold draught, and making my way out of the passage to the Boulevard, I turned to the right, deciding that it would be far less uncomfortable, on the whole, to walk than to get into a windy *sapin*. What should I do—go to bed? It was too early, and, moreover, my interview with this strange youth had so affected

me that no thought of slumber or repose could for the moment be entertained, so when my idle steps brought me to the Place de l'Opera, I turned into the Opera House and went up to the box of a friend. The opera was over, but the ballet, *La Korrigane*, had but just begun, and as I entered, the well-known, graceful music reached my ears, and the dainty Rosita Mauri came slowly from the back in the *pas de la Sabotière*. The club boxes were packed tight, and indeed the whole house was crowded, but feeling no desire either to talk scandal with the men or pay my court to any of my many fair friends, I, after having paid my tribute of admiration to the grace of Rosita, left the box and the house, intending to stroll up to the Cercle de l'Union and then go to bed. As I stood on the steps of the Opera House, lighting a cigar, I felt a hand placed lightly upon my shoulder, and turning, I saw an old acquaintance of mine, the famous *savant* and fashionable physician, Leopold Maryx, the great specialist for all disorders of the nervous system, and certainly one of the most curious products of our nineteenth-century civilisation. Of his early years but little really was known, but the legend ran that he had at one time been immensely rich, owning a great number of slaves and vast plantations in South Carolina, and that then, having had a taste for

medical science, he had attended to and experimented on his own slaves when a mere boy, in this way gaining a wide practical experience at an age when most youths are trying to stumble through Virgil at school. The War of Secession and the Emancipation of the Slaves had of course ruined him, but as he was at that time still quite young, he determined to dedicate what remained of his fortune to the completing of his medical studies, and had for that purpose come to Europe and sat under most of the scientific celebrities of the day, labouring incessantly and sparing neither time nor money in his endeavours to realise the dreams of his ambition. He indeed very soon became famous, for he found that the practical experience he had obtained on his own plantations had given him an insight into certain diseases, and especially those the more intimately connected with the nervous system, which led him to speculations which astonished, by reason of their audacity, the more sedate and prudent medicos of the Old World. But Leopold Maryx cared but little for this; he studied and bided his time, and at length the hour of his triumph sounded. The Queen of Scythia was suddenly seized with a terrible nervous malady, and a great specialist from Heidelberg was sent for, but this great man failed utterly to cure Her Majesty, and seeing this, Maryx very boldly

wrote to the queen that he felt confident he could cure her, but that even if she did not care to let him have the honour of attending her, if she would merely take a certain drug, which he specified and which at least was harmless, she would at once experience a marked improvement in her health. The medicine was taken, the prophesied improvement experienced, the adventurous doctor sent for, the queen cured, and the man's fortune and reputation made, all in three months. Of course, such sudden and splendid success made him many enemies, and "charlatan" and "quack" were the least unkind epithets levelled at his head by his envious colleagues. At length Maryx could stand it no longer, and challenging a very eminent physician who had insulted him, but who was old enough to be his father, to fight a duel, he shot him through the heart. "That's the first patient I have lost!" he cynically remarked, when his opponent fell before his fire. Then the scientific world of Europe set up a howl of execration, which Maryx quietly answered by restoring to health a prime minister and a Hebrew financier, both of whom had been given up as lost by all the leading physicians of the day. There was no withstanding such arguments as these, so the fatal duel was forgotten, and Maryx once more became the rage. He resided in Vienna,—where

indeed I had first met him,—but he had a *pied à terre* in Paris, where many of his most influential and illustrious patients lived. He was an avowed atheist, a man of the loosest morals, a confirmed and desperate gambler, and a hardened cynic ; but as his visits almost invariably restored health to the ailing, and always afforded amusement to the idle, his society was courted by all who were really unwell and by all who imagined themselves to be so, that is to say, in other words, by the vast majority of mankind.

“What, Maryx!” I exclaimed, as I shook hands warmly with my illustrious friend. “You in Paris at Christmas time!”

“I am only here for forty-eight hours. I came on to see the Princesse de Birac, and return to Vienna to-morrow night. I haven’t seen you for months! Are you coming to the Baden races again this year?” Two among the very many peculiarities which distinguished this most extraordinary man were that he was a confirmed gambler, indulging in every kind of gambling, and that he could boast with truth that he only needed one hour’s sleep every three days. He did not wait for my answer to his question about the Baden races (where I had seen him four months before losing thousands), but proceeded—“Have you anything special to do to-night? Any engagement?”

"No; why?"

"Would you like to see a man guillotined?"

"What an extraordinary question! Why?"

"Because if you would, you had better come with me. It's a bore going alone, and I don't want a man with me who is likely to make a fool of himself."

"I shan't certainly do that. When is it?"

"To-night. I have cards from the prefecture."

"Who is it?"

"Corsi."

"The man who killed that woman in the Rue Louis le Grand?"

Maryx nodded.

"I remember seeing the poor woman play in the *Trois Margots* at the Bouffes, two or three years ago."

"She was pretty, was she not?" asked Maryx.

"Yes, very."

"*Tant pis!* there are not many!" exclaimed this extraordinary man. "Well, will you come?"

"Is it very horrible?"

"Certainly not; nothing at all. This will be the seventh I have seen. The worst part is the waiting—the trick itself is done in a minute," and the great physician made a gesture with his hand to indicate swiftness.

"Well, I'll go, doctor—of course, for the pleasure and honour of your society." Maryx

nodded and smiled. "What time does it take place?"

"About five."

"Five? *Diable!* And what are you going to do till then, Maryx?"

"Try my luck there," he said, smiling, and pointing over to the Washington Club. "And you?"

"I am going to the Union for a few minutes, for I want to see a man from our embassy if I can, and then I shall go back to my hotel. Will you call for me?"

"Where are you staying?"

"At the Westminster—it's on your way."

"Very well, then; I'll be with you at about half-past three or four. It's a devil of a distance, you know, to the Place de la Roquette, so don't keep me waiting."

"I shan't keep you waiting. You will find me there waiting for you, probably asleep."

"*C'est parfait! à tantôt alors,*" and the great specialist picked his way across the Boulevard to the gambling-rooms.

I failed to find the man I was in search of at the Cercle de l'Union, and so, within an hour of having parted with Leopold Maryx, I found myself seated alone by my fireside at the Westminster, having given orders to admit the doctor when he should call in the early morning. As I lighted my cigar and seated myself by the

blazing logs, the thought occurred to me how odd an evening I had been spending, to be sure. The lonely dinner in the Grand Seize to begin with, the selfish musing over past follies, and the visions of the days gone by, and then the meeting with this lad and what he had revealed to me of the treasury of his noble spirit, and then the dying child and the toy, and then the meeting with the great Leopold Maryx and his gruesome invitation. How strange it all was! The dying child must have had her doll now quite two hours ago, and was doubtless asleep with it clasped tightly in her arms, while perchance, in their poor little room, her friend was watching by her bedside now at this very moment, in the stillness of the night, while I sat comfortably by this blazing fire, wiling away the hours until the time should come when I could go forth, as to a play, to see a strong man butchered! One thing I was determined to do, and that was to look after the welfare of this dying child and this strange lad. I knew I should meet with opposition from the latter, for I could see that his was a high-spirited and independent nature; but I told myself that I would let nothing daunt me, and that, no matter at what expense of time or money, I would labour unceasingly to bring these two, the child and her self-sacrificing protector, to look upon

me as a friend in whose power, perchance, it might lie to bring sunlight into their joyless lives. Having so decided, I threw away my cigar, took up the *Débats*, and ere long had fallen into a profound sleep, from which I was awakened by the voice of the great doctor saying calmly, "Come, we must not be late ; it is time !"

CHAPTER II

IT was four o'clock in the morning and piercingly cold, and the Rue de la Paix looked perfectly deserted as my companion and I, both well muffled in furs, hurried into the *fiacre* which the doctor had come in from the club, Maryx giving the ominous order, *à la Roquette !* to the coachman in what seemed to me a needlessly melodramatic tone of voice.

"I shall have to leave you after a while," explained the great man, puffing at a very abominable and stubborn *Londrès*, "for you can well imagine I am not taking all this trouble out of mere morbid curiosity."

"I don't understand you."

"I am going as a professional man, and to study. I have a special permission to accompany the officials to the condemned cell when they go

to tell the convict he must prepare to die, and I shall stay close by the man until his head falls. Of course, however, I can't take you with me."

I shuddered.

"I would not accompany you if I could, *mon cher*," I exclaimed, "and I half regret having consented to come at all. Do they suffer much, do you think?"

Maryx nodded his head wisely. "That depends upon the individual. They would probably suffer, and suffer greatly, were it really the knife that killed them, but in nine cases out of ten the convict is practically dead when he is thrown on to the plank. The last few seconds are—or perhaps only the last second—so full of terror that a numbness sets in, the brain becomes chloroformed, as it were, and this, coupled with the stunning shock proceeding from the fall of the heavy knife, renders in most cases the patient very nearly, if not quite wholly, insensible to the pain of the cutting. There are, of course, exceptions—I believe this to-night will be an exception—and these exceptions may indeed suffer terribly."

"How?"

Maryx looked at me and smiled. "Why, if I were to pinch your leg now, you would feel it at once, would you not?"

"Of course."

"That is to say, the messenger from the place

pinched would run up with the news to headquarters—your brain—at once, would he not?”

“Yes.”

“Well, imagine the news the messenger must bring, who flies to headquarters as the body rolls one way and the head another!”

“Ah! Terrible indeed!”

“But in most cases,” proceeded the great therapist, “as I say, the brain is already chloroformed—benumbed by fright, as it were—and then stunned by the weight of the knife before the cutting begins, so that the horrible news is told to ears that hear not, and thus the suffering is probably very slight.”

“But why should you think this man to-night will be an exception?”

“Because he has one chance less than most convicts of escaping suffering. It appears he does not in any way fear death, so that the chloroforming or benumbing, which I spoke about, will not in his case take place, so that, if the shock from the fallen weight fails to stun him, he will be killed by the cutting, which will of course be very dreadful. In other words, this man Corsi will most likely live, really live, until the very last moment;” and here the doctor turned and looked at me and added in a tone that made my blood run cold—“*And beyond the last moment!*”

"Is he an educated man, do you know?" I inquired, after a long pause.

"I believe so. He was a courier at one time, and then passed himself off as an Italian nobleman, and lived on the weakness and generosity of the women who fell in love with him, and their name was legion, I believe, for I am told he is a very good-looking fellow with a splendid physique. I am looking forward with great pleasure to the autopsy which my French colleagues have kindly invited me to attend."

"But what do you expect to see that will interest you in your special department before the man is killed?"

"What do you call my special department?" inquired Maryx, with an amused smile.

"The nerves, and all that sort of thing of course."

"*Quel toupet!*" murmured the great man, as he struck a light for the twentieth time. "What an abominable cigar!"

"Throw it away and try one of mine."

"Thank you, I will." Then, when we had both begun smoking, he continued—"I don't, as a matter of fact, expect to see anything very interesting, but still I may, for Corsi is, as I say, no ordinary criminal, and perhaps his death will be no ordinary death. His courage is, I believe, not assumed, but the real thing; not bravado, but

real bravery—an absolute contempt for death. I shall be interested to see whether this keeps up to the very last. It very rarely does, especially when a man is in robust health, for the physical shrinking from death, which is naturally and almost inevitably experienced by a man full of life when he feels the executioner's hand on his shoulder, generally brings about a complete revolution in his nature—transforming him entirely: as it were, debasing him—I might almost say, dissolving him. Of course, bravado and apparent nonchalance up to the very last moment are common enough, but they of course are no proof of the absence of terror.”

“Is there any such proof?”

“No very satisfactory proof; but still, when I am close to Corsi at the last moment, as I shall be, I think I shall be able to tell if his coolness—always provided he does not go all to pieces when they trim the hair and cut the collar, as most of them do,—I shall, I say—at least I think I shall,—be able to tell whether his coolness proceeds from real courage or is merely assumed. I hope it is not real for his own sake, but I am going to watch and see.” Then after a pause Maryx added, “We whose business it is to prolong life can never fail to learn something by perching as close to death as possible, clinging, as it were, around those about to depart, until the

one is suddenly pulled in, and click! the door is slammed in our faces!"

This was one of those peculiar speeches for which Maryx was famous, and which his numerous enemies declared that he made for the gallery, but which at all events were one of the causes of his being constantly in hot water with his less talkative brother-savants. We both now relapsed into silence, Maryx evidently enjoying the cigar I had given him, and I vainly endeavouring to find in my heart some excuse for thus sinning against the elementary laws of taste and good feeling, by going to see a fellow-creature done to death out of mere morbid curiosity.

Suddenly Maryx leant forward and let down the window.

"See," he said, "we are not far off now."

And indeed it was easy to see we were approaching some centre of general interest, for the pavement on either side was densely thronged with people advancing in the same direction as ourselves. Suddenly the vehicle stopped.

"Here we are!" exclaimed Maryx. We alighted, and, the doctor telling the coachman where to wait for us, we passed on through the crowd to the *cordon* of *Gardes de Paris*.

"*Cartes de la préfecture*," murmured my companion, producing them. The brigadier after a close inspection, both of the card and of ourselves,

muttered a gruff "*Passes!*" and we penetrated into the infernal circle wherein the dance of death—but this time a *pas seul*—was shortly to be performed. The soldiers lined the great Place de la Roquette, keeping the mob back, so that there was a large open space absolutely empty save for the presence of a few shadows, which I took, rightly or wrongly I know not, to represent reporters for the press.

Maryx looked at his watch. "We shall not have to wait long now. *Tant mieux!* It is desperately cold!" he murmured; and then turning to me he said, "You won't mind my leaving you now, will you? I ought to go into the prison."

"Go, by all means," I replied. "I would rather be alone."

"Very well, then. Do you see that bench?"

I nodded.

"Well, when the men come to erect the guillotine, the police will force you all back to the side-walk. It ought to have been put up long ago; I never knew it so late, but it can't fail to be here soon now. When you are forced to retreat, you certainly can't find a better place to see from than that bench, so when it's all over I'll come for you there, and if I don't find you there you know where our cab is. I shall go on there at once and wait for you."

"Very well," I assented; "*C'est entendu,*" and then, after shaking hands with me, Maryx disappeared in the gloom in the direction of the prison where the condemned man lay. I walked to the bench he had indicated to me, and sat down and waited.

The Grande Roquette, wherein the prisoners condemned to death sleep their last sleep on earth, faces the Petite Roquette or prison for juvenile offenders, so that here we have in this comparatively small space the whole history of human villainy — from the first petty larceny, which brings the mere infant to the reformatory, to the cruel murder leading to the condemned cell, from whence the hardened outcast walks to the scaffold. Horrible as the place is at the best of times, it is of course rendered ten times more detestable on such a night as the one I am describing, by the fact of all that is most vicious and evil in the French capital being attracted thither to see the last act of the tragedy played out, and the curtain and the knife fall together on the story of an ill-spent life. The authorities had, as I have said, encircled the *place* wherein only persons provided with tickets of admission were allowed to penetrate, but coming from beyond this infernal circle could be heard the cries and murmurs of the mob massed on the other side of the *cordon*.

laughing, singing, cat-calling and chattering like jackals.

“Voyez ce Corsi :
Voyez ce Corps la !”

some hoarse voice broke out, braying to the well-known tune in *Les Cloches de Corneville*, and the refrain was at once taken up by a hundred cynical mountebanks.

“Voyez ce Corsi :
Voyez ce Corps la !”

began a shrill female voice, and the mob joined in at once again. Could the sound of this ghastly mirth reach the condemned cell I wondered, and this gay strain wedded to such terribly significant words be the first warning to the doomed man that the end had come?

I arose and walked to the side to look at the mob, never doubting what I should find there, and I was not mistaken! There they were all—the devastators of the soul, the ringers of the curfew bell to hope—all, *au grand complet*, and I recognised them well. There, close to me, dressed like the night-porter of an hotel, was a man the very type of Tiberius, the same humorous, sensual, cynical nose, scenting even from the stews of Capri the death of a god in the far-distant province of Judæa; there, revealed in the sullen bull face of a butcher boy, was Nero, nurtured in incest and stupidly

reflecting over some approaching spintrian recreation ; there, supporting himself against a tree, tall, pale, lean as a wolf, was the devilish de Sade ; while Theroigne de Mericourt, with dishevelled hair and the light of murder in her eyes stood by her lover's side ; and who, even the dullest, could fail to recognise in the pale, worn face of that street urchin the sparkle of the soul-killing smile of Voltaire ? I turned from them with horror and again the song broke out—

“Voyez ce Corsi :
Voyez ce Corps la !”

I began walking up and down to keep warm, longing for the dawn to break, the shadows in the enclosed space becoming every moment more numerous as the hour of the final expiation drew nigh. How gloomy the two prisons looked, so gloomy that their gloom was visible even this most dark and gloomy night ! Now the half-hour struck, and some verses of poor Albert Glatigny came to my mind—

“Espoirs ! Ruines écroulées
Le bonheur avare s'enfuit :
Voici les heures désolées
Qui tentent dans la grande nuit.

“Le vieux château sur les ténêbres
Détache son bloc sombre et dur ;
Un nid rempli d'oiseaux funèbres
Hurle dans les fentes du mur.

- “ Et dans cette ruine immense
 Qui penche sur ses noirs piliers
 Le Deuil austère et la Démence
 Passent l'un à l'autre liés.
- “ Salut, O mes vieux camarades !
 C'est vous dont la voix m'appellait
 Dans ces menteuses mascarades
 Ou l'éclat de rire râlait !
- “ Voilà qu'il faut se mettre en route,
 Aujourd'hui plutôt que demain.
 Soit ! nous emmenerons le Doute
 Pour nous divertir en chemin !”

Was he awake, I wondered—the man for whom this night would be, dark as it was, the brightest he could hope to see for evermore? Awake and thinking, the chambers of his memory, which might have been illuminated with the pure light of tenderness and pity, transformed by a hideous slaughter-trick into a noisome dungeon re-echoing with the wailing of the Fates?

- “ Evite tout ce que l'on aime ;
 Fuis jusqu'à la fleur ; reste seul,
 Et dans ton navrement supreme
 Drape toi, comme en un linceuil !
- “ Va sans répit, O mi-érable !
 Par les ennuis du Sahara
 Ta plaie est la plaie incurable
 Que nul baume ne guérira !

“ Enivre toi de la souffrance,
Comme d'autres des printemps verts :
Le cadavre de l'Espérance
Derrière toi se mange aux vers.

“ Et voici la bonne Folie
Ouvrant sa porte à deux battants
Afin que ta douleur oublie
Et s'endorme quelques instants !”

How dark it was! The moon had gone long ago, and the stars had gone, and the dawn would not yet come! Death had perhaps told light to wait until the tragedy on the scaffold should be over, and morning, finger on lip, was standing hushed with awe, hesitating to unfold her gleams of hope until the shadows of despair should have dispersed.

Suddenly I saw a light, and then another, and another; and then the crowd, that had during the last few minutes been chilled and tired into comparative silence, broke forth again as if reinvigorated and refreshed by what it saw approaching—the guillotine! Slowly up the ascent, drawn by a white horse and with policemen walking on either side, came a long *fourgon* or covered cart, and through a small window in the side a light was seen gleaming, revealing shadows passing to and fro—the shadows of the guardians of the instrument of death, of the valets of the guillotine. The first cart was followed by another, but this

second one was altogether dark and sombre, and as these two terrible vehicles came lumbering slowly up, weighed down by the clumsy weight of the death instrument and its workers, they were followed by a common cab, that in which the priest would proceed to the cemetery —(the “turnipfield,” as the French term the ground wherein those who have suffered on the scaffold are buried)—when the guillotine should have done its worst. The two carts stopped, one behind the other, but the driver of the cab turned quietly to the left and drew up by the kerbstone, as if bespoken by death and ready to wait patiently, knowing that his fare would not deceive him. The police now pressed us back to make room for the coming performance. *Place à Sa Majeste la Mort!* they might have cried as they drove us back, and as men looking like carpenters suddenly emerged from the surrounding darkness, and opening one of the carts with a key, began taking out the beams and posts, and cross-beams and bolts, laying them carefully on the ground preparatory to the building up of the throne on which the king of terrors would shortly sit to hold his court. Then carefully and swiftly, and almost noiselessly, riveting more than hammering, the valets of the guillotine began their horrible work of creating; little by little, piece by

piece, even as the demoralisation of the wretch about to be sacrificed thereon had doubtless set in, the infernal altar was built up, lifting its head towards heaven, but with a sly wink hellwards. Then a man ran out, and then another, and then another ; then one returned with a ladder, and then the other two came, bearing something which they seemed to hide but which was evidently heavy. They mounted the ladder carrying the weight with them, and then there came to my ear strange and horrible noises of riveting, then of the working of a pulley, then of the snapping of a spring, then of the letting down and pulling up of a burthen, and then the men on the ladder rapidly descending, all fell back suddenly like shadows, and I saw It suspended between the two upright beams ;—It, the knife, shining in the gloom like the lewd face of some gaunt Messalina waiting, relentlessly waiting, with famished, pendent arms, until her lover and prey should be brought to her sharp kiss and death-giving embrace. All now was ready, and here came the executioner, limping out from the surrounding shadows, a little, thickset, broad-shouldered, red-bearded man, with a heavy greatcoat, tall hat, and white muffler, holding in his hand a small lantern, and looking like some vulgar auctioneer's clerk come to take an inventory stealthily by night. And

his hideous inventory he took in very deed, and with consummate care, as if a labour of love—peering forward to examine the instrument of death, patting it, pushing it, kicking it, shaking it, then bowing down before it as if in ecstatic worship, and holding up his lantern to see it the more plainly; then, rising again, he suddenly clambered up the ladder like a monkey, and began playing with the fatal spring. I turned my head aside in horror, but my eyes lighted on a still more hideous sight—two baskets, the one small but deep, placed close to the guillotine, and on a level with it in front; the other, long and comparatively shallow, placed to the right of the fatal plank! In the first-mentioned, the small but deep one, a tall burly youth with bare arms was scratching out a place in the sawdust for the head, and the pungent particles as they mounted made him sneeze! I closed my eyes, and as a sardonic whisper came to my memory the words of Jean Paul: “When the heart is made the altar of God, then the head—the mental faculties, are the lights on that altar!” Ay! but when the heart is made the altar of the devil—what of the head then, oh, good friend Richter? When I opened my eyes again the servants of the guillotine had left their mistress, and she was standing alone; but the night had

taken one terrible leap towards morning, the dawn was breaking, and I then, for the first time, noticed the double row of mounted *gens-d'armes* facing the scaffold, the officers in front; and this sight, reminding me, as it did, that it was a stern act of justice, and not a revelry of revenge, that I was about to witness, refreshed me as a breath of air coming from a purer world.

“Ah! there they go!” murmured, in a hoarse whisper, a man standing by my side, and following the direction of his eyes I saw the significant movement to which he alluded—five or six individuals slowly disappearing into the prison through the little wicket-gate, which closed noiselessly behind them. They had gone to tell him, it had at length begun,—the prelude to the end,—and if the condemned wretch had not heard or suspected anything before that night, he would be knowing now! This thought was terrible to me. The sight of the merciless composure of the sombre prison-walls, while my imagination whispered to me what must be going on within them, filled my heart suddenly with immense pity for the man about to die. Everything was against him, everything and everybody. He was to be spurned out of a world that had doubtless ill-used him, into the presence of a God who would not forgive him. If the pity, the heartfelt pity, of a fellow-

creature, his fellow in weakness if not his fellow in crime, could reach him at this supreme moment and cheer him in his progress from this passing hell to that eternal one, he should have it!—What cared I what he had done, how vile and cruel and horrible had been his life? I had not been witness to his crimes, how could I then, oh, how could I, have so degraded myself as to come to see the punishment? It might be well to destroy him—that he should be killed, butchered, mutilated, there and then that very morning by the falling of the knife, I saw there, upon his neck—all this perhaps was right, humanly right, if not divinely right—but what was wrong, and worse than wrong, was that I—Ah! No! no! no! It was not I! I must have been mad, or influenced by some horrible spell cast over me by that demon Maryx, to have so forgotten myself as to have dared approach a dying fellow-being save on my knees, with tears in my eyes, a prayer on my lips, and with arms outstretched in pity and compassion! I looked eagerly about me to see if I could escape, but no: impossible, it was too late—I was wedged in tightly and could not get away. I must stay, but I could at least pray for the doomed man and close my eyes when I should see the gate of the prison open and the death procession about to issue forth. So, looking up to

the, fresh, hope-kissed, sparkling morning sky, my heart cried out, though my lips moved not—"Almighty Father, Thou who art Love"—but here a prolonged, gasping O-o-o-h of horror proceeding from a thousand throats chilled my heart to silence, and turning, as if spellbound, my reluctant eyes were riveted to what they fell upon. The great central gate of the prison was open wide, and from it a white figure and a black figure side by side emerged, the condemned man and the priest, the felon looking like an armless doll, fashioned to amuse a nursery full of gibbering demons, for his head was shaved, his arms pinioned back, and his legs tied so tightly together that he could only totter or waddle forward like a baby learning to walk, or like a toy moving by clockwork. The expression of the face—"its" face, for there was surely nothing human here—the eyes literally out of their sockets with terror, and almost lying on the cheeks; the mouth weakly, half open; the waxen yellow complexion, with the temples wetted by a livid green; the convulsive upward movement of the head and chin as the thing tottered forward or was pushed gently from behind by the headman's aid, formed together a spectacle of horror far surpassing anything I could have conceived. I was vaguely conscious that the priest was, in

a voice broken with emotion, endeavouring to encourage and comfort his charge, holding up in his trembling hand a crucifix before the hideous face, which seemed to pay no heed, to see no cross, no Saviour, no hope—only the guillotine, the red beams, the knife, the baskets; but I was only vaguely conscious of the words and movements of the priest, for my whole attention was taken up by the other, the one who would go on when the priest should be forced to stop, the one who would have to continue his journey alone, and only stop—ah, where would his dreadful journey end, and what at that journey's end would be awaiting him? And so, stumbling, waddling, tottering, half hopping, he, who had once been a man, came out to death, his gaze—if anything so terrible, so inhuman, could be called a gaze—never being removed from the upper beam of the guillotine, or rather from that part of the scaffold that was the most full of meaning to him—the knife. When this terrible couple, the man in black and the thing in white, had advanced within two yards of the guillotine, the priest stopped, took the felon in his arms, kissed him twice, the boisterous noise of the lips against the flesh sounding as a repulsive mockery at such a moment, and then stepped quickly back. Even as he did so the white thing was seized and hurled with great

violence forward on to the plank, the executioner waved his hands, the plank fell forward and the knife shot down with a re-echoing, tremendous crash. Then a crimson, noisy spout of blood, as from a hose—a sound as of a volume of liquid spurting convulsively from a pump, and then a wild scream rent the air, and turning I saw someone, who had been standing not far from me at the side, fall backwards in a dead faint, doubtless overcome by the horror of the scene, and as he fell I recognised my strange young friend and fellow-countryman—Roselin Tudor!

CHAPTER III

PUSHING my way roughly through the crowd, I was by the lad's side at once.

“I know him,” I exclaimed, “he is a friend of mine.” Then turning to a policeman I said, “I came up here with Professor Leopold Maryx, and”—

“Ah! Dr. Maryx!” exclaimed a young man standing near. “There he comes.” And indeed just at that moment the head of the great savant was seen towering over the crowd and advancing in my direction.

"What is the matter?" he exclaimed rather gruffly, and evidently not in the best of humours.

"This young fellow is a friend of mine and has fainted, that's all," I explained. "I know where he lives and want to get him home."

In an instant I had a hundred offers of assistance, for the sight of the red rosette of Commander of the Legion of Honour, which the doctor wore in his buttonhole, acted like a charm. The lad was still unconscious, so Maryx, after having stared at him for a moment, suggested that he had better be carried to a neighbouring wine-shop and fortified with some cordial before being taken to a cab and driven home. So two stalwart men lifted the light burden and led the way to the nearest *bastringue*, Maryx and I following on in the rear.

"Well," I ventured to inquire, "and were you pleased? Did you succeed in observing anything of special interest?" Maryx shook his head savagely.

"Interest!" he echoed; "why, it has been an absolute waste of time coming here. If I'd known what I know now, I'd have given you my card to come alone, and stuck to the baccarat. Why, the man was such an arrant coward that he almost had a fit when the barber's scissors touched his neck cropping his hair. I have seen many criminals die in many countries in my

life, but I never saw such an uninteresting cur as this Corsi!"

"But they told you he was brave."

"Bah! Mere bravado. He counted on the president commuting his death sentence at the last minute. Have you got a cigar?"

We had now reached the Assommoir, and I having explained matters to the landlord, who showed us into an inner room, the boy was laid on a table, and Maryx began attending to him. No crowd had followed us, for I fancy fainting fits are not uncommon events in that quarter on such occasions, but the front room of the wine shop was nevertheless packed tight with a vile mob of ruffians of every description, who, now that the ghastly spectacle they had come to witness was over, were regaling themselves with *saladiers* of *petit bleu*, and stifling not a few parrots¹ as they made their comments on the events of the last few minutes. As their remarks were wholly unedifying I closed the door, just as Maryx, with a wineglassful of kirsch in his hand, standing near the recumbent and unconscious lad, exclaimed, "Ah! *Nous voila!*" and turning, I saw Tudor gasping and opening his eyes. As his mind seemed to grasp the situation his face flushed,—the strangely-powerful, rugged, ugly face,—and he made a

¹ "Etouffer un perroquet" means in Argot, "drink a glass of absinthe."

violent endeavour to spring from the table, but Maryx held him down gently but firmly.

"Be quiet, my boy, be quiet," he exclaimed, in a quiet tone of command.

"Where am I? Who are you?" gasped the boy in French; but then, as I approached and his eyes fell upon me, he fell back overcome with astonishment, murmuring in English—"You here? Am I dreaming?"

"No, my dear fellow," I replied cheerfully, "you are not dreaming. You are all right now—you fainted, that's all, and I happened luckily to be by and took the liberty of taking care of you. You'll be all right in a minute."

"Where am I?" he inquired, in a husky voice. "How did I faint? Where did I faint?"

"Why, you came up here as I did, I suppose, to see a man guillotined and"—

"Oh, I remember!" murmured the poor lad, in a tone thrilled through with horror, and falling back he became once more insensible. This second fainting fit lasted much longer than the previous one, lasted indeed so long that I could see it caused Maryx considerable anxiety, although he said nothing, and indeed both he and I remained mute while he was attending to his patient.

"Ah, it's all right now," he murmured at length, as the lad gave signs of recovering consciousness;

“and high time too.” Then as the boy opened his eyes again, I bent over him and said gently—

“You must pull yourself together, Tudor; you must let me see you home.” He stared at me blankly, hardly seeming to understand what I said.

“Here, drink this,” said Maryx, taking the glass of kirsch and putting it to the lad’s lips. “Drink this at once, it will do you good.” A look of suspicion crossed the scarred leonine face, but then the poor boy’s eyes lighted on the magic rosette, he looked at Maryx, who was smiling, and then at me, and then as if reassured he opened his mouth and drank the cordial.

“Ah,” said the doctor, “that’s a good boy; now you’re all right.”

“Thank you, monsieur,” murmured the lad in French; “you are very kind to me.”

“You will be all right in a minute or two, Tudor,” I said, speaking in English, “but you must let me see you home. You are too weak to go home by yourself.”

“Oh no,” he exclaimed, “I can get home perfectly well by myself in a minute. I’d rather.”

“I don’t care what you’d rather do,” broke in Maryx, with affected sternness; “I know better than you do, and I tell you you are not in a fit state to go home by yourself. If you will not let my friend here take you home, I shall go with you

myself. Where does he live?" he added, in a low tone.

"298 Rue St. Marc," I replied, in a whisper, but the lad heard me, opened his eyes and smiled.

"Ah, you remember!" he murmured.

Maryx had taken out his notebook, and, after scribbling a few lines on a page, tore it out and gave it to me. "He lives near a friend of mine, Dr. Tangpy, Rue Louis le Grand, 94. Send for him at once and use my name. I hope you take no particular interest in this lad, for he has not a year's life left in him." Maryx watched me narrowly as I read what he had written, but my face evidently revealed to him nothing of importance, for as my eyes met his he smiled and nodded his head. Then he went to the door and called for the frightened landlord.

"Is there a chemist near here?" he inquired.

"Yes, monsieur—only two steps off." Maryx wrote a few lines and gave them to the man, at the same time extracting a louis from his pocket.

"Bring back the chemist and his medicine with him in five minutes and I will give you this. Now be off! Make haste!" When the man had gone, Maryx turned to me. "You had better go to your cab and have it brought to the door here at once. I shall take this lad back with me myself; he interests me. There will be no room for you, so you had better go

on to his home before us and prepare his friends. You are no good here, and you may be useful there. We shall be there very soon after you."

I hesitated.

"What is it?" asked the great man; then he added impatiently, almost rudely, "Why don't you do as I tell you?" I had intended telling Maryx what I knew of the lad's home, but the imperative tone in which these last words were uttered closed my lips and I departed. When I had found our cab and driven back in it, the chemist had already arrived, and Maryx had given orders that no one was to be admitted to the inner room. So I left word that I had gone on, hailed a passing *fiacre*, jumped in and drove off to the address the lad had given me. The Rue St. Marc is an old street, and No. 298 is one of the oldest houses in it, a house that had very evidently been built for some of the wealthy citizens of Paris about a hundred and fifty years ago—an old *hôtel* in fact, with a splendid gateway and spacious courtyard, the lower part of the building being now used for commercial purposes, but even the upper rooms being only let out to most respectable tenants.

It was now nearly seven, and Parisians being—although such is not generally supposed to be the case—much earlier risers than Londoners, I found the *concièrge* busy washing the courtyard.

He was an old man, and I could tell at a glance, of a kind and gentle nature. I told him at once my story: how M. Tudor, who was a friend and fellow-countryman of mine, had fainted in my company an hour or an hour and a half before; how he was having the best possible medical attendance, and how I expected him home every moment, and had come on beforehand to tell his friends of his accident.

"M. Tudor!" exclaimed the worthy man, almost letting the broom fall in his astonishment and consternation. "You mean little Roselin?" I nodded assent. "Fainted!" he continued; "and where? He has lived here two years and I never knew him out so late before, although he often sits up copying all night. And to-night of all nights."

"Why do you say 'to-night of all nights'?" I inquired. The man looked at me, evidently surprised.

"Well, and Corsi? Wasn't it for this morning? The papers said so." I saw I was treading on dangerous ground and so held my peace, not wishing by pretended knowledge to elicit any particulars concerning the lad's life which he himself had not told me; but my discretion was of no avail, for the *concièrge*, interpreting my silence and increased sadness of aspect to signify that I knew all the circumstances of the case,

proceeded, "*Ce gredin de Corsi!* He ought to be guillotined twice over, for he really killed two people. M. Roselin will never get over the murder of Mademoiselle Marie!"

"Mademoiselle Marie!" I echoed, now fairly amazed; "I don't understand!"

The man looked at me for a moment in astonishment and then said suspiciously, "I thought you said you were a friend of M. Tudor?"

"So I am," I stammered, "but I have not known him long, and"—

"Bah!" interrupted the man, "then his private affairs can hardly interest you. I'm sorry I spoke. I naturally thought, as he sent you on to let us know, that"—

"He did not send me on, he does not know that I have come on, he—but there he is!" I abruptly broke off, as a cab drove up to the door. Maryx leant out of the carriage-window and beckoned to me and the *concièrge*.

"He tells me he lives on the fifth floor; he must be carried up; he can't walk." But here Tudor, who was lying back in the arms of the chemist's assistant with his head on a pillow, in a half swoon, opened his eyes, and on recognising the *concièrge* an expression of great anxiety came over his face.

"Aristide," he whispered, catching his breath,

"she doesn't know, does she?" The honest *concièrge* shook his head, and his eyes filled with tears.

"No, *mon pauvre ami*, she knows nothing. We didn't know you had gone out—you said nothing to us about it, but when my wife went up as usual this morning she found the little one sound asleep with the doll in her arms. That was only half an hour ago."

"I ought not to have left her; it was selfish of me, but I am punished for it." Here he closed his eyes wearily. Maryx got out of the cab and took the *concièrge* and myself aside.

"This," he said, "I fear, will be a very serious case. His nervous system has received a very terrible shock, and his constitution seems to me to have been always weak. Perhaps he works too hard." Once again did the sight of the rosette of Commander of the Legion of Honour in the doctor's buttonhole exercise its potent spell, for the *concièrge*, now seeing that he was speaking to a man of importance, cast his discretion to the winds and began eagerly—

"Oh yes, monsieur, he works very hard, and he was never strong, I"—

"Never mind now," interrupted the doctor, "the first thing to do is to get him to his bed. Pray go and tell your wife, and then come back and help us to carry him upstairs to his room. He is suffering from a series of fainting fits, and I

want to get him to bed at once. Pray lose no time—I don't want him to faint in the cab." But here a voice called from the cab, "M. le Docteur! M. le Docteur!" and hurriedly returning, he found the chemist's assistant in great trepidation, for the lad had again become insensible, and was lying in his arms as one dead. The wife of the *concièrge* now put in an appearance, but being like all true Parisiennes a most sensible and practical, although most tender-hearted, woman, she wasted no time in vain lamentation, but gave me at once some useful information. I explained everything to her in a moment.

"M. Tudor is an Englishman, as you know, and I met him last evening for the first time. He greatly interested me, and I am only anxious to be of service to him."

"Ah!" she interrupted, "is monsieur then the gentleman who bought that beautiful doll for little Mariette?" I nodded. "Oh, if you had only seen the pleasure it gave her! *Chère petite!* What she has suffered and what M. Roselin has suffered, God only knows!"

"She is asleep now, is she not?"

"Yes, at least she was half an hour ago—asleep with the doll in her arms. But she is so weak she sleeps most of the time!"

"There is no one else living with them, is there?" I inquired.

"No one; M. Roselin lived here alone until the mother of the little one was murdered, and then he took her to live with him. But she will not live long. The doctors say she may die any day now." These few words of explanation took only a minute or two, and were spoken as the chemist's assistant and Aristide were making, under the surveillance of Maryx, preparations to lift the inanimate form from the cab.

"Let me," said the *concièrge*; "I can easily carry him alone. He weighs nothing, *pauvre petit!* Here, Caroline," addressing his wife, "take the key and go up with the gentlemen first."

"You go with her," said Maryx, turning to me, "and see that all is right. I will stay here and see the boy is properly lifted." So, turning into the courtyard, I followed the woman, who, with key in hand, led the way.

"We need not disturb the little one," she explained breathlessly, as we mounted the stairs; "M. Roselin's bedroom, where he sleeps and works, is next to hers, but there is a thick wall between, and she will hear nothing if we are careful. I had no idea he had gone out; he ought to have told us. He came in at midnight with the doll—we were just going to bed, but he dropped in to see us, to ask us to come up and see the little one's delight. So we both left the *loge* and went up with him. She was waiting

for him, wide awake, for he had told her he was going to bring it to her. She has talked of nothing else for weeks past. Oh, monsieur, if you had only seen her joy, it would have made you cry!"

"What did she say?" I inquired, trying to keep my voice calm.

"She heard us coming, for, as I opened the door, M. Roselin called out, 'I've got it, *chérie*; I've got it!' and we found her sitting up in bed, trembling with excitement, her arms outstretched. Then M. Roselin ran up to her and put the box in her arms, and took her in his and kissed her and fondled her. He was crying, monsieur; I saw the tears streaming down his face. But the little one hardly seemed to see or notice him. She watched him eagerly as he undid the parcel, but none of the pretty papers seemed to give her pleasure, she was so anxious to see the doll," and here the woman paused, breathless.

"And when she did see it?" I inquired.

"Ah, monsieur, when she did see it, she cried out in such a piteous way, 'Maman! Maman! Maman!' and took it in her arms and hugged and kissed it, and then we all cried and laughed together. Then we left them, my husband and I, and we heard nothing more. M. Roselin said nothing about going out, but as I always come

up at seven to see how Mariette is, I found he was not in, and the little one was alone and asleep, and so I went away without waking her. He must have crept out in the early morning. Somebody called out *Cordon s'il vous plait* at five, but we were sleepy and took no notice, not recognising his voice, and so simply pulled the cordon. It must have been he." We had now reached the fifth floor, and the worthy woman unlocking a door to the left of the landing, we found ourselves at once in a large, lofty, wainscoted, old-fashioned room, very poorly furnished, and with the floor littered with papers. In one corner stood a small iron bedstead, in the centre of the room a writing desk, also covered with papers, and these, with three shabby chairs, which might at one time have been green, but which were now no colour in particular, a chest of drawers and a washing-stand, completed the furniture of this humble dwelling-place. The looking-glass over the fireplace—which was a comparatively large one for the apartment, as I have already said belonged to a house which had a century or more before evidently been built for people in affluent circumstances—was crowded with letters, memoranda, and cards.

"The little one sleeps next door," whispered the woman, nodding in the direction of a thick green baize door which was closed, "and the

walls are so thick that when the door is closed you have to call to be heard." While thus speaking she was opening and smoothing the bed, which had evidently not been slept in, and now, as I heard the tread of men carrying a burthen mounting the stairs, she began making the fire, I standing by her side the while, and half unconsciously reading the open notes and cards lying on the mantelshelf. "*Mon cher* Roselin—Come on to me in the Cité Bergère at eleven. *Bien à vous*. E. Gondinet." "Send me back the first act of *Denise* at once—A. Dumas." "*Mon cher* Tudor—Madame Sarah wants to see you to-morrow morning before twelve—don't fail—*à vous*, G. Clairin"—and so on. Suddenly my eyes lighted on a photograph, cabinet size, of a young actress, and I recognised at once the girl I had seen three years before acting in *Les Trois Margots* at the Bouffes—Marie Dufresne, the woman Corsi had assassinated—the mother of the child sleeping in the next room. How well I understood now the look of horror which had come into his face when he said, in reply to my question, "Her mother did not die of consumption!" But the sound of footsteps slowly mounting the stairs drew nearer, and Maryx entered the room.

"Ha!" exclaimed the great man, drawing a long breath, "your friend lives too near Paradise

to suit me, but he has comfortable enough quarters when you get here. Here he is—be careful—be careful.” And the *concièrge* came staggering into the room, carrying in his arms the unconscious lad, and followed by the chemist’s assistant. “Lay him on the bed—there—gently—so. We will undress him and put him to bed presently. Lift his head higher—there, that’s right.” Then turning to me he said, “What do you intend doing? I am going to stay here—I have nothing special to do this morning, and this case interests me.”

“Of course I shall stay,” I replied. “I can’t tell you how much I am obliged to you, Maryx,” and I tried to take his hand. But he laughed, and ignoring my proffered hand, ran his fingers through his beard.

“How absurd!” he exclaimed. “I am merely indulging in a caprice, that is all. Is he living alone?”

“No, he has a child, a little girl, living with him. She is asleep now in that room and knows nothing.” And then, speaking in German, I told him in a few words what I knew, Maryx all the while listening to me but keeping his eyes fixed on the prostrate form of the lad on the bed.

“No, no, no!” he exclaimed suddenly to the chemist’s assistant, who had unbuttoned the boy’s collar, extracted a small bottle from his pocket,

uncorked it, and was about to apply it to the lad's lips. "Leave him alone. I will attend to him presently myself. But if you want to make yourself useful, get this made up for me at once and bring it back yourself," and drawing up a chair to the writing desk he sat down, pushed all the papers and books on to the floor carelessly, and having thus cleared the deck for action, seized a pen and piece of paper and began writing, talking as he wrote. "When you have got this made up and have brought it back to me yourself, go to Dr. Tangpy's—you know where he lives, just round the corner, don't you?"

"Yes, M. le Docteur."

"Well, go to him, wake him if necessary, and tell him I want to see him here at once and shall wait until he comes. Tell him in fact what you like, but bring him back with you."

"*Très bien*, M. le Docteur," said the man, delighted beyond measure at being entrusted with a message from so illustrious an individual as Professor Leopold Maryx. "*Je n'y manquerai pas*," and he bowed and departed.

"Now," said Maryx, speaking very quickly and in German, "I must repeat to you what I said before. This is a very serious case. I will not bore you with scientific terms you would not understand, but I tell you frankly the boy is dying—that is, he will not, may not at least,

die now, but he certainly will not live a year, unless some extraordinary change for the better sets in which I can hardly hope for. He is insensible there now, and will remain so until I choose to bring him round, which I shall do presently. But he will need constant care and watching. I will stay by him till my friend Tangpy comes," and here Maryx divested himself of his hat, gloves, and voluminous fur great-coat, and began arranging his disordered evening-dress, smoothing his white tie, and examining with great care a rather damaged gardenia, as if he were about to wait upon an archduchess—"and I will tell Tangpy what I think and then leave your protégé in his hands, for I am lunching with Vulpian at twelve, and leave for Vienna to-night. What do you intend doing?"

"You asked me that before and I told you—I shall stay here also," I replied, following the example set me by Maryx, and throwing my greatcoat and outer accoutrements on top of his; "I shall wait until you think I can go back to the hotel and change my dress, and then come back here again. I can't tell you how this poor lad interests me." Maryx nodded.

"So he does me," he said. "His case is a most curious and complicated one. Mind you write to me in Vienna and let me know how he gets on. Tangpy will write of course, but I

shall learn more from the frankness of an unprofessional man and friend than from the finesse and flattery of a confrère. I intend telling Tangpy exactly what he must do, but no doubt he has views of his own, and of course I can't count on his following my advice."

"Very well. I will write to you everything."

"And now," said Maryx, changing into French, and addressing the *concièrge* and his wife, whose horror at hearing the detested language spoken had been somewhat modified by the unexpected sight of two gentlemen in evening-dress standing before them, "tell me about this little girl—my friend here tells me she is very ill." The woman nodded. The sound of the German language had made her sullen and suspicious, so I came to the rescue, lest her rudeness should offend my friend.

"This gentleman," I said, as if introducing the great savant to the servants, "is Professor Leopold Maryx of Vienna. He is not a Prussian, but an Austrian, and a good friend to France."

"Doctor Maryx!" exclaimed the woman, "Leopold Maryx! The great Leopold Maryx who came from Vienna to see the emperor just before the war?"

"The same," I replied, smiling at the woman's enthusiasm, and then turning to my friend—"There is true flattery for you, *mon petit carabin!*" The great man stroked his beard,

evidently greatly pleased ; to hear that his fame had even reached these poor people was more than pleasant to him.

“ If your poor emperor had only listened to me ”— he began, and then broke off suddenly— “ But tell me, my good woman, about this little girl. I should like to speak to her before my young friend here recovers his senses, for if she should scream or cry it would make him worse, whereas now he is unconscious, and if I let her know now that he is ill and that she must be quiet, we shall have got over all that before he recovers consciousness.”

“ She is sleeping in there,” said the woman, pointing to the green baize door ; “ shall I go and wake her ? ” Maryx hesitated.

“ No,” he said, after a pause, “ I think I will go in by myself ; if she is asleep I will have time to watch her, listen to her breathing, and see what I think of her—if she is awake I will call you in.” And so saying, Maryx walked to the green baize door, opened it gently, and passed into the next room on tiptoe, the door swinging to noiselessly behind him,

“ *Mon Dieu ! Mon Dieu !* ” exclaimed the poor woman, in a low tone, lifting up her hands in astonishment, “ to think that this is Doctor Maryx ! The great Doctor Maryx whom the papers said had told the emperor that if he ”—

But just then Maryx emerged from the adjoining room, and said very gently, and in almost a reverent tone—

“Poor little child, she is dead!”

“Dead!” echoed the *concièrge* and his wife, “dead!”

“Come and see,” said the doctor, opening the door; “she has been dead an hour at least.”

The room into which we now passed was even more large and airy than the one in which poor Tudor lay, and had evidently been tastefully decorated by him for his little friend. There was a sofa and a *chaise longue* and many easy chairs and an open piano, with a piece of music standing open on the rest, as if the player had suddenly been interrupted in his playing; and there were pretty mats on the table and flowers—violets; and pretty pictures on the walls, and toys on the mantelshelf, and on the chest of drawers and table—everywhere: cheap toys, but the best he could afford to buy: and a child’s picture-book with gaudy pictures lying open on the little table by the bed: and a crucifix lying by it, and a closed prayer-book; and the bed itself was white and bright and pretty, and had dainty little pink curtains hanging over it and half hiding it, curtains which Maryx now drew back to show us that he had not been deceived. There she lay, a pretty little baby-girl, lying as

if asleep, with a smile upon her face, clasping tightly in her arms the beautifully-dressed doll; the bright, pretty face of the puppet with the staring blue eyes, the golden curls, the little earrings, and the fashionable bonnet, lying close beside the ashen cheek of the dead child, who had so longed for it and so loved it because it looked like her murdered mother, and who now, in God's mercy, had been taken to that mother. Death, more capricious than any pretty woman, had put aside all aspect of sombre majesty here, had come on his mission of peace unaccompanied by any horror, but lay nestling there like a soft white dove hiding beneath a pretty toy.

"How very beautiful!" murmured Maryx in German, and my heart echoed his words—"How very beautiful!" And so we three stood there speechless and in awe, spellbound at the sight of this most vulgar accident of life—the ending of it, that common event which Schiller says, is so universal that it must be good. And gazing on that fair dead face, the thought came to me, how strange it was that I, by the merest accident, should have been the means of enlivening it with its last smile, and yet have come too late to make smiles dwell thereon as I had hoped to do! And then the love, the simple self-sacrificing love this dying lad in the next room bore to the dead child lying there, how everything told of it

—the doll she held in her arms most of all! And as this thought came to my mind, my eyes left the two pretty and inanimate child-faces lying cheek by cheek on the pillow—the one as lifeless as the other, but both smiling—and fell upon the music lying open on the piano rest. I recognised it at once, for it was one of my favourites—a waltz of Chopin, a posthumous work,¹ one of the saddest and most touching expressions of a broken heart. Innocent and tender in its utterance as this child's life, but sad as her untimely death, no piece of music ever composed by a great mastermind could possibly have been more in harmony with what so lightly lay upon that bed than this.

Maryx was the first to break the silence. Turning to the man he said, "You had better go to the Mairie and report this at once. My friend Dr. Tangpy, who will be here in a few minutes, will see about the rest. In the meantime you had all better leave me here alone."

So we three, the man and his wife and I, returned to the adjoining room, where we found Tudor still lying on his back insensible, looking, indeed, far more like a corpse than she whose breath had really sped for ever, and it was, in fact, probably the majesty of his stillness and the great pathos of the repose of this lad, who would

¹ Book IV., 1836. Op. lxix.

soon be called back again to life to have his heart once more cruelly wounded, that checked the outburst of violent emotion which I had seen foreshadowed in the face of both the *conciërge* and his wife.

"Hush!" I said in a whisper, pointing to the lad, as if he could hear us, "we must be quiet and make no noise. It is all over with her—we must now only think of him." Then turning to the man—

"You had better go at once to the Mairie," I said, "but send me the first commissionaire you meet on your way. Your wife will stay with me for a moment—I have something to say to her." When the man, who by this time could with difficulty restrain his emotion, had left the room, I said to his wife, who stood as if half dazed, looking at the unconscious youth and with the tears streaming down her cheeks, "Have you any vacant rooms in the house?"

At first she could hardly trust herself to answer me, but at length she said, "Yes, there is a large apartment on this same floor to be let, on the other side of the landing, but it is unfurnished."

"Well, I will take it for the time being until the proprietaire lets it—I will pay him beforehand, so he need fear nothing." The woman hesitated.

"But it's unfurnished, monsieur," she repeated.

“Well, you can easily hire for me, or buy for me, what is necessary. I am going to stay here.” And I put a thousand-franc note into her hand, the poor woman gazing at me with an astonishment that almost interrupted the falling of her tears. Then I sat down and wrote two letters—one a line to my servant at the hotel, telling him to bring me what was necessary, and then a letter to one of my dearest friends, the Duchesse de Lussac, who is as good as she is fair, and as fair as she is good, and what can I say more? I hurriedly told her all, adding that I knew I could rely upon her aid and advice, and that I should wait impatiently until she could come and give it me. Of course I knew she would in any event come in person, but I was desirous of giving her the satisfaction of knowing that I felt sure of it. Just as I had finished, the commissionaire arrived, and almost directly behind him came the physician whom Maryx had sent for. I told him all in as few words as possible; he looked at the lad for a moment, felt his pulse, shook his head, and then went into the next room to join his colleague, without saying a word.

But what took place during the next few days I need hardly linger over. When Tudor was brought round, his mind was found to be wandering, and then brain-fever set in. Madame de

Lussac came in great haste at eleven, and her husband, the duke, who was never behindhand in good works, followed her at two. When Maryx returned from his breakfast with Dr. Vulpian at three, he found his colleague Tangpy paying his second visit, and so we five, the duke and duchess the two physicians and myself, held a council of war. That I should stay by the lad until the last, or until he should have sufficiently recovered to permit of my moving him to more comfortable quarters (the duchess had suggested his removal to her own house in the Rue de Varennes at once, but neither of the medical men would listen to that), I had decided, and all present approved of my decision. All pecuniary details I of course took upon myself, Tangpy promised to do all that science and his own experience (coupled, if need be, with that of his friends) could achieve, while Madame de Lussac undertook the most precious part of all, the tender care, nursing, and sympathy. So Maryx was justified in saying, when he departed late in the afternoon, and only just in time to dine in haste and catch his train, that he left his interesting patient in good hands, and that if he did not recover it would certainly not be for lack of care. The funeral of the little girl took place on the following day; the duke and his good and beautiful duchess undertook all the details

connected with that ceremony, and converted the death-chamber into a *chapelle ardente*, in the middle of which stood, literally covered with flowers, the coffin containing the dead child and her doll, which, at the suggestion of Madame de Lussac, was buried with her, and during all that time poor Tudor lay partly in a swoon and partly delirious, but wholly ignorant of what was taking place around him, and mercifully unconscious that his little friend had left him and was being taken to her last resting-place without a farewell kiss from his lips.

And now an extraordinary phenomenon took place—one of those things which I think could only be possible in Paris. Suddenly this delirious dying lad—this poor, ugly, almost deformed, youth, who was a foreigner by birth and who lived by the few paltry francs he could earn by copying—became the fashion, and the right to watch by his bedside (of course I had engaged a trained nurse recommended by Tangpy) came to be looked upon as a coveted privilege by the ladies of the “noble Faubourg,” and all that was bluest of blood, fairest of face, and most richly endowed with acres, ducats, and power in the patrician world of Paris, took turns by day and by night to watch by the bedside of this broken-hearted little waif, not carelessly and capriciously, but earnestly and tenderly; Madame la Marquise

coming from the opera to take the place of Madame la Comtesse, who was due at a soirée, and Madame la Marquise in turn being relieved by Madame la Baronne on her return from a ball. The rooms which I occupied and had partly furnished became, as it were, a cloakroom for these fair dames, and, on my return from a short walk, I would often amuse myself examining the Russian sable cloak, or the velvet mantle, or the bonnet, or the lace muffler, or the bour-nous, and endeavouring to divine by them the identity of the lady I should be called upon to greet when I penetrated into the sick chamber. The tenderness and care and skill which these *grandes dames* gave proof of in nursing seemed to me marvellous and almost incredible; and ladies whom I had considered incapable of any more strict obedience to the divine will than that which may be comprehended in being absolutely adorable in grace, beauty and refinement, showed a patience, sympathy, and kindness—now gently smoothing the pillow with their jewelled hands, now skilfully lifting the weary delirious head with their fair arms—which even Florence Nightingale could hardly have excelled. But these garret rooms in this old house in this shabby street were not only thus transformed into a vision-house, wherein a most sweet dream of fair and good women rested as

a perfume, but they furthermore became the rendezvous of all the most prominent men of letters in Paris, most of whom knew Tudor personally, and from them I learned some of the particulars of his past life.

His father, an Englishman by birth, had come to Paris in early youth, and been engaged in some literary capacity by the benevolent Galignanis, but he had left them after some years and started for himself as a bookbinder and printer on a small scale at Rueil near Paris. From what I could gather he would appear to have been a man of considerable culture and refinement, but a visionary—weak and self-indulgent, and feebly ambitious. The lad's mother had been a famous model, and had thus been brought into contact with all the celebrities of the artistic world of Paris, Theophile Gautier, however, having been her staunchest and truest friend, and the godfather of her son and only child, to whom the great Romantique had given the absurd name of Roselin, after the legend of the Quatre Fils Aymon. When "Astarte," as Baudelaire had christened the beautiful model, married plain John Tudor, the struggling English printer, great had been the wailing and gnashing of teeth in the artistic world, but as she died eighteen months after her wedding-day, the memory of her beauty had not had

time to fade away, and all the painters, sculptors, poets, and litterateurs of Paris came forward to do their best to aid the broken-hearted widower and the infant Rosclin, foremost among them, of course,—as he was always in the front rank when a deed of delicate kindness was to be done,—being Jules Sandeau, who took a special interest in the child's education and training, and eventually got him a berth in a bookseller's shop in the Rue des Saint Pères, where, if the salary was but meagre, the lad had the run of all the classics in every language, several of which he mastered at once, his good-natured employer, himself a famous scholar, taking delight in teaching the clever boy Italian, Latin, Greek, and German, and thus introducing him to the best works of the greatest thinkers. Then a great misfortune befell the lad: he was seized with small-pox in its most virulent form, and after months of suffering, during which his father died, he left his bed at the hospital disfigured and debilitated for life, to find that his employer had failed and left Paris. In this emergency Jules Sandeau had again come to the rescue, and reminding his literary colleagues that they could not let the son of Astarte die of starvation, had procured for him, in connection with the house of Deporte, dramatic and other copying work for him to do; the leading men of letters of

Paris, moreover, banding themselves together, at the instigation of Sandeau, to invest for the lad in the form of an annuity a sum in the Rentes, small of course, but sufficient to keep him—especially when supplemented by what he might earn by copying—from absolute indigence. Such was the simple story. When, where, and in what way he had ever become acquainted with Marie Dufresne, the murdered actress, nobody seemed to know; but then, as de Lussac reminded me, the *pauvre ver de terre amoureux d'une étoile* is a common enough event in the artistic world of the Ville Lumière.

Many a long and weary day and night passed before an opportunity presented itself of telling the poor boy of the death of his little friend. I had thought the matter over and consulted with my friends, and taking into consideration what the doctor said about the lad's death being merely a question of weeks, and recalling to mind what he himself had said about his desire to die, I had decided that under the circumstances the news that his child-friend had gone before him would come to him as a joy rather than as a fresh sorrow. Nor was I mistaken in this conjecture, although I was indeed spared the pain of breaking the news to him, for he divined it. It came about in this wise. After a terrible night of delirium he had fallen into

another swoon, and on his recovery from this came his first lucid interval. Mdme. de Lussac, the trained nurse, and I were by his bedside, when he opened his eyes and looked at me for the first time with a glance of recognition. His eyes then wandered around the room, and I divined what he was looking for, and then, as I saw he wished to speak, I bowed my ear to his lips.

“Is she asleep or dead?” he whispered.

“Which would you wish her to be?” I inquired.

“Dead,” he murmured.

“She is not asleep,” I said. He looked at me, and my eyes told him what he sought to know.

“Thank God!” he murmured, “for I am dying too!”

A week after this the end came, but three days before his death the delirium left him and he became very calm; and when at length he was allowed to speak, we told each other all we had to tell. I told him all that had taken place since that terrible night on the Place de la Roquette, and very plainly informed him that he was right, and that he was dying, but that I should be with him to the last.

And he in his turn told me the simple story

of the only romantic episode in his life—his love for the murdered actress: of how he had first seen her in a fairy piece at the Porte St. Martin and lost his heart to her: of how she had laughed at him and scorned him, but still allowed him, out of pity for his great love of her, to see her sometimes as a humble and devoted friend who would willingly lay down his life for her: and of how by degrees he had brought himself to look upon this privilege as a greater and more precious joy than if she had given him her heart. Then came the advent of the handsome and mysterious adventurer, Corsi, whom the girl had met and fallen in love with at Monte Carlo, and then the robbery and the murder. The victim had no parents, and so Tudor had taken her little child. The rest the reader knows. The story, as I say, was a most simple one, but told in the lad's strangely dramatic way it was a terrible one. His mind indeed seemed to me like a most curious armoury, in which might have been found perhaps almost any weapon, from the brave lance of the pure-hearted knight to the jewel-hilted dagger of a Borgia; the result, doubtless, of many morbid influences, the unhealthy fruit of precocious and misdirected study springing from an overtaxed imagination, nourished by unsatisfied passion, and strengthened by a spirit of revolt against the

accidents of life which had kept his soul from soaring. He was a true *fleur d'Asphalte*, born of a caprice and nourished in the unhealthy atmosphere of the studios and *coulisses*, and had it not been for the vigour and spirit which were very apparent even on his deathbed, and which he had inherited from his English father, his many though undeveloped talents might have led him into crime, backed up and spurred on as they were by a vanity which had lost nothing of its morbid strength by the fact of its never having met with that partial justification which comes with success. As it was, the innate manliness of the lad had induced him to assume the haughty attitude of a disdainful rebel, and given to his rugged, disfigured countenance that expression which, as I have said, was leonine and reminded one of Danton.

Roselin Tudor lies in the cemetery of Père la Chaise, and now, when at Christmas time I find myself alone in Paris, there is one invitation which is resistless, one hospitable challenge which may not be refused — the one coming in a noiseless whisper from that lonely grave; and, while I stand there looking down upon the simple little mound, there invariably steals into my ear the sad despairing melody of that posthumous waltz of Chopin which always

A WALTZ OF CHOPIN

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seems to me to tell, almost in detail, the story of Roselin Tudor's life.

Lento.

The musical score is written for a single melodic line in treble clef. It is in 3/4 time and the key signature has two flats (B-flat major). The tempo is marked *Lento.* The score consists of three staves. The first staff begins with a 4-measure rest, followed by a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note Bb4. The second staff starts with a quarter note Bb4, followed by a triplet of eighth notes (A4, G4, F4), a quarter note E4, a quarter note D4, and a quarter note C4. The third staff begins with a quarter note Bb4, followed by a quarter note A4, a quarter note G4, a quarter note F4, a quarter note E4, a quarter note D4, and a quarter note C4. The piece concludes with a double bar line.



A KISS OF JUDAS



'Woman of outer darkness, fiend of death,
From what inhuman cave, what dire abyss,
Hast thou invisible that spell o'erheard?
What potent hand hath touched thy quickened corse,
What song dissolved thy cerements, who unclosed
Those faded eyes and filled them from the stars?"

LANDOR-GEHIR.

CHAPTER I

TOWARDS the end of September, about eight years ago, the steamship *Albrecht*, under the command of the popular Captain Pellegrini, had on its voyage down the Danube, as far as Rustchuck, the honour of counting among its passengers a gentleman to whom not inaptly might have been addressed the somewhat audacious remark made by Charles Buller to the late Lord Houghton: "I often think how puzzled your Maker must be to account for your conduct." And, indeed, a more curious jumble of

lovable and detestable qualities than went to the making up of the personality labelled for formal purposes Lieutenant-Colonel Richard Ulick Verner Rowan, but familiarly known to society as "Hippy" Rowan, it would, we think, at least in the restricted kingdom of charming men, have been difficult to find. Selfish almost to cruelty, and yet capable of acts of generous self-sacrifice which many a better man could not perhaps have risen to; famous for his unnecessary harshness in the numerous wars in which he had distinguished himself, and yet enjoying the well-merited reputation of being the best-natured man in London; Hippy Rowan, thanks to the calm and healthy spirit of philosophy which was his, had in the course of his fifty odd years of mundane experiences—which had been varied and of a character calculated to embitter a more delicate nature—never allowed a touch of cynicism to chill his heart, albeit perchance a warmer corner therein was reserved for his enemies than for his friends, owing to the caloric quality invariably lurking in well-founded scorn. It is not so easy and common as many may imagine to be content with a great deal; but in the golden days when much had been his,—at the meridian of his altogether pleasant life, in which even the afternoon shadows were in nowise indicative of the terrors of advancing night,—Dick Rowan was

possessed of the same serene spirit of content which distinguished him in the later and more troublous times when he found himself forced to look gout and debt in the face on an income barely double the wages he had formerly given to his *cordon bleu*. Although, when we present him for the first time to our readers, Colonel Rowan is past fifty, and has been for the last twenty odd years what he himself termed "hopelessly and irretrievably ruined,"—which meant that he could count on but little over a thousand pounds per annum for his maintenance,—in former days he had been far more well-to-do, and, indeed, for a very short time—a period of about twelve months—he had been the possessor of a very large sum of money, wealth suddenly inherited, which he had squandered in the most extravagant fashion, but his excesses thoroughly enjoying the while, as a refined, healthy, handsome, and hot-blooded beggar mounted on a two-year-old thoroughbred, and bound for that uncomfortable capital described by St. Theresa as a place where there is a bad smell and no love, might reasonably be expected to do.

Disraeli used to say, "When I meet a man whose name I cannot remember, I give myself two minutes: then, if it be a hopeless task, I always say, 'And how is the old complaint?'"

Now, if the great Tory leader could be imagined by any miracle forgetting the name of his highly-esteemed friend Hippy Rowan, and meeting him and asking him the above searching and comprehensive question, the reply doubtless would have been, "I only got back last week," or "I'm going next month," or something after that fashion; for very certainly Colonel Rowan would have interpreted "the old complaint" to signify his passionate love for Paris, the theatre of his splendid follies, the sepulchre of his fortune indeed, but the Mecca whither the faithful feet of the voluptuary were ever eager to speed—the shrine at which his knees, even when gouty, were glad to kneel. The sole surviving representative of one of the most patrician families of Ireland, a man of remarkable personal beauty,—his good looks, by the way, in his youth would have been best described by the slang adjective "showy," for, ever a man of gigantic stature and herculean build, his bright auburn hair and beard had given him during the earlier part of his career a loud and flaming aspect which rendered him a hopelessly compromising Clavaroche for any Jacqueline to keep clandestine appointments with,—reckless and daring to a degree but rarely attained even by his fellow-countrymen, to whom, however, temerity is often ascribed as a national failing, Dick Rowan had

certainly distinguished himself in his martial profession ; and the same may be said of that portion of his life passed in the House of Commons, in which august assembly he had for many years helped to represent an Irish county. But to the twelve months of riotous living in Paris already spoken of, Hippy, beyond all doubt, chiefly owed his fame ; and his laurels, both as a warrior and as legislator, paled before the roses which crowned his wine cup filled with Yquem of '37, and the myrtles sacred to Venus of which he wove garlands for that goddess by Seine side. But his career as one of the acknowledged leaders of *la haute noce* in the capital of pleasure had been brief though brilliant. Persistently playing the "rubicon" at four louis a point at the Petit Club, while at the same time constantly assuming the onerous responsibilities of an open bank at the Jockey, possess, when unfailling bad luck attends such gallant endeavours to win the smiles of fickle fortune, at least the advantage not common to all evils, of providing in themselves their own antidote and cure ; and so, at the end of twelve brief months devoted to such pastimes, and others no less costly though less avowable, the gallant colonel had been forced to acknowledge his defeat, and retire with his never-failing grace from the French capital, exchanging indeed with regret

Dugléré for the Speaker, and leaving with a sigh the sparkle of the Grand Seize for the comparative respectability of St. Stephen's. All this had taken place twenty years and more before the opening of our story, and in the course of this score of years Hippy, by reason of certain prolonged and dangerous rambles undertaken by him for purposes of sport and amusement in all kinds of outlandish countries, had acquired among his friends a not inconsiderable reputation as a traveller, and he who, while his money lasted, had been quite content to limit his wanderings to explorations in the *pays du tendre*, when forced by unmerciful disaster to fold his pleasure tent and steal away, had sought to solace his soul for the loss of his fortune by "going to and fro in the earth" after the fashion of the prince in whose service indeed that very fortune had been spent—one year suffering himself to be entertained by the Emir of Bokhara, and in the course of the next twelve months accepting the hospitality of the Imaum of Muscat; becoming acquainted in his rambles, gun and notebook in hand, with all sorts and conditions of men, from sovereign despots, nay, demi-gods, to slaves ranking far below quadrupeds; by no means altogether limiting his pastimes to sport pure and simple, but, for instance, leaving Pall Mall one day to see if Schliemann had forgotten

nothing in the Trojan plain, and endeavouring to catch Beke tripping in Sinai the next; in all these expeditions being, of course, greatly aided by his rare and precious gift of easily and accurately acquiring all languages and dialects, the choice Arabic with which it amused him to surprise the Shereef of Wazan being no less fluent than the Polish in which he flirted with pretty patriots in the land of Kosciuszco.

But the expedition on which he was bent when we introduce him to our readers was one calling for the lead of neither pencil nor pellet, but a journey of purely social purport. The all too-brief days of Hippy's magnificence in Paris had been, so far as they went, concurrent with the reign of splendid folly which has made the name of Djavil Pacha famous in the annals of apolausticism; and some of the most happy hours of Rowan's Parisian existence having been passed in the celebrated apartment on the corner of the Rue Taitbout and the Boulevard des Italiens, inhabited by the Turkish millionaire, between his excellency and the gallant colonel a warm feeling of friendship had sprung up—not the mere passing liking born with the *bisque* and ceasing with the coffee, but a genuine sympathy which lasted when the banquet was all over and the lights put out, which expressed

itself in various graceful and cordial fashions after both had retired from Paris, and which, just before our story opens, had taken the form of an invitation from Djavil to his friend to spend a few days with him at his palace on the Bosphorus, a summons which Dick Rowan was now steaming down the Danube to obey. He had chosen this particularly monotonous and uncomfortable way of reaching his friend for reasons which do not concern us; but the thought of the unpleasant railway journey from Rustchuck to Varna which awaited him, and then the Black Sea to encounter, did not tend to assuage the twinges of gout and irritability which assailed him by fits and starts as, during the two dreary days he watched the shores on either side glide slowly by—seeing on the right Hungary at length give place to Servia, and then Servia to Turkey, while perpetual Wallachia, sad and desolate, stretched unceasingly and for ever to the left—walking up and down the deck leaning on the arm of his trusty valet, or rather, Ancient or Lieutenant, Adams by name, a man almost as well known and fully as well informed as his master, a Cockney who, without any control over the aspirates in his native English, spoke eight other different languages, including Arabic, accurately and fluently, and whose knowledge of Oriental countries dated indeed

from the days when he had been page-boy to the great Eltchi in Constantinople. There were but few passengers on board,—an abnormally small number in fact,—and to this circumstance, doubtless, was it due that Rowan, who as a rule paid but little attention to his fellow-travellers, happened to remark a mysterious-looking individual—a man, and apparently not an old one—who sat quite apart from the others and by himself, muffled up to the eyes in a very voluminous, albeit rather dirty, white silk handkerchief, and who was evidently an invalid, judging from the listless way in which he sat, the extreme pallor of the only part of his face which could be seen, and above all, the fever-fed light which glared from between sore and lashless eyelids. He was dressed entirely in black, and although his clothes were somewhat shabby, they betokened carelessness on the part of their wearer rather than poverty; and Adams had noticed and called his master's attention to the fact that on one finger of the man's thin, yellow, dirty hand, which every now and then he would lift to rearrange still higher up about his face the silken muffler, sparkled a diamond, which the omniscient valet recognised to be a stone of value.

“What an extremely disagreeable-looking man, Adams!” pettishly murmured the colonel

in English, as he and his servant in their perambulations up and down the deck for the twentieth time on the first morning of the journey passed by where the mysterious stranger sat. "And how he stares at us! He has the eyes of a lunatic, and there is evidently something horrible the matter with his face. Perhaps he's a leper. Ask the captain about him."

But the ever-amiable Captain Pellegrini had not much information to impart, save indeed that the man was certainly neither a madman nor a leper, nor indeed, so far as he knew, an invalid. He was a Moldavian, Isaac Lebedenko by name, a young man, a medical student or doctor, the captain thought; but, at all events, a man in very well-to-do circumstances, for he always spent his money freely.

"I have known him off and on for two years, please your excellency," said the skipper. "Though I must confess I have never seen his face properly, for he's always muffled up in that way. He takes his meals by himself, and of course pays extra for doing so, and in fact he always, so far as I know, keeps entirely to himself and never speaks to anyone. But the steward's boy, who has waited on him and seen his face, says there is nothing the matter with him, except indeed that he's the ugliest man he ever saw."

"Perhaps he's consumptive," suggested the colonel. But the all-wise Adams shook his head. That was quite inadmissible. He had seen the man walk, and had noticed his legs. Phthisis could not deceive him, he could recognise its presence at a glance. This man was as strong on his legs as a panther; no consumption there.

"Well," said the colonel impatiently, "there's evidently something wrong with him, no matter what, and I'm glad I'm not condemned to remain long in his society, for he certainly has the most unpleasant look in his eyes that I've seen since we left the lepers." And then he turned the current of the conversation, and the subject dropped.

That night very late, when the colonel was sitting quite alone on deck smoking a cigarette and thinking over his approaching visit to Djavil, wondering what persons his old friend would have invited to his palace to meet him, and a thousand souvenirs of the long-past pleasant Paris days thronging to his mind as he dreamily glanced up at the moon which smiled over slowly-receding Servia, a voice close by his ear, a slow, husky, sibilant, high-pitched whisper, broke the stillness, saying in lispng French, "May I ask, Monsieur, by what right you dare to question persons about me?" and,

turning, he saw standing by his shoulder the horrible man in shabby black, his eyes glaring with exceptional ferocity from between the red bare lids, and the diamond-decorated claw-like hand grasping convulsively the soiled white muffler, presumably to prevent the vehemence of his speech from causing it to slip down. Hippy rose to his feet at once, and as he did so his face passed close to the half-shrouded countenance of the man who had addressed him, and the familiar sickening smell of animal musk, full of disgusting significance to the experienced traveller, assailed his nostrils.

"What do you mean?" he exclaimed, shrinking back, his disgust quite overpowering for the moment every other sentiment. "Stand back! Don't come near me!"

The man said nothing, stood quite still, but Rowan saw plainly in the moonlight the red-encircled eyes gleam with renewed ferocity, the yellow claw-like hand wearing the diamond ring and grasping the dirty muffler agitated by a convulsive spasm, and heard beneath the silken covering the husky breathing caught as in a sob. Hippy recovered himself at once.

"Forgive me, Monsieur," he said coldly. "You startled me. Might I beg you to repeat your question?" The man said nothing. It was evident that he had perceived the disgust he had

inspired, and that his anger, his indignation, mastered him, and that he dared not trust himself to speak. "You asked me, I think," continued the colonel in a more gentle tone—for his conscience smote him as he reflected that he might perhaps involuntarily have caused pain to one who, notwithstanding his unpleasant aspect and arrogant, not to say hostile, attitude, was doubtless merely an invalid and sufferer—"You asked me, I think, Monsieur, by what right I made inquiries concerning you? Pray pardon me for having done so. I have, indeed, no excuse to offer, but I am really sorry if I have offended you. I merely asked the captain"—But the man interrupted him, his voice, which was tremulous with passion, coming as a husky, wheezy hiss, which rendered the strong lisp with which he pronounced the French the more noticeable and grotesque.

"You asked him—you dared ask him, if I were not a leper. He told Hoffmann, the steward's boy, who told me. You can't deny it! Dog of an Englishman!" Here, gasping for want of breath, and apparently quite overpowered by his anger, the man took a step towards Rowan. This outburst of violent vituperation came as a great relief to the colonel. Like most persons of refined feeling, he could stand any wounds better than those inflicted by self-reproach, and

the suspicion that perhaps by careless rudeness he had caused pain to one worthy only of pity had been as gall to him. The man's violent hostility and bad language entirely altered and brightened the aspect of affairs.

"I am sorry," said Hippy, with ironical politeness, "that my nationality should not meet with the honour of your approval. It is not, *hélas!* the proud privilege of all to be able to boast that they are natives of Moldavia, you know! *Pour le reste*, all I can do is to repeat my apology for"— But the man interrupted him again.

"Apology!" he echoed, if indeed any word indicative of resonance can be applied to the hoarse, damp, lisping whisper in which he spoke—"Apology! Ah, yes! You English curs are all cowards, and only think of apologies. You dare not fight, *canaille*, but you shall! I'll force you to!" And again he took a step forward, but this time in so menacing a fashion that the colonel, half amused and half disgusted, thought it prudent to step back.

"Take care!" he said, half raising his stick as if to push the man back as an unclean thing. "Keep your distance;" and then, speaking quickly, for he feared an assault from the infuriated Moldavian, and was desirous of avoiding such an absurd complication, he continued,

“If you can prove to me that I ought to meet you, I shall be happy to do so. You’re right, of course, in thinking duels are no longer the fashion in England. But I’m an exception to the rule. I’ve fought two already, and shall be happy to add to the number by meeting you if it can be arranged. But that’s hardly a matter you and I can properly discuss between ourselves, is it? Captain Pellegrini knows me. I’ll leave my address with him. I have friends in Turkey, and shall be staying in the neighbourhood of Constantinople for a fortnight, so, if you care to send me your seconds, I will appoint gentlemen to receive them. Allow me to wish you good-night!” and Rowan raised his hat with much formal politeness, and stepped aside as if to depart. But the man sprang forward like a cat and stood in his way, “Coward!” he exclaimed, extending both arms as if to bar Rowan’s passage—“Cur! like all your countrymen! You think to run away from me, but you shall not! You shall go on your knees and beg my pardon, you accursed Englishman—you dog—you”— But just as the enraged Moldavian reached this point in his fury an awful thing happened. The yellow, claw-like hand having been withdrawn from clutching at the dirty muffler, the vehemence of the man’s speech began gradually to disarrange this covering, causing it little by little to

sink lower and lower and thus to disclose by degrees to Rowan a sight so strange, so awful, that, impelled by a morbid curiosity, he involuntarily bent his head forward as his horror-stricken eyes eagerly noted every step in the infernal progress of this revelation. And thus, gazing at the slowly slipping silk, he saw first,—beardless, hollow cheeks, twitching with emotion, but of a most hideous pallor, of indeed that awful hue inseparably associated with the idea of post-mortem changes; then, in the middle of this livid leanness, lighted only by those fever-fed, red-lidded eyes, the beginning—the broad base springing from the very cheekbones as it were—of a repulsive prominence which apparently went narrowing on to some termination which as yet the scarf hid, but which the horrified colonel felt every second surer and yet more sure could not resemble the nasal organ of a man, but rather the— ah, yes! the silk fell, and in the moonlight Rowan saw the end he had foreseen, the pointed nose as of a large ferret, and beneath it, far in under it, nervously working, the humid, viscous horror of a small mouth almost round, but lipless, from which came in hurried, husky sibilance the lisping words of hate and menace. This awful revelation, although partly expected, was so inexpressibly horrible when it came, that, doubtless, the expression of disgust in Rowan's

face deepened so suddenly in acuteness and intensity as to arrest the attention of the monster who inspired it, infuriated though he was; for he paused in the lispng tumult of his violence, and, as he paused, became suddenly aware that the muffler had slipped down. Then, as this knowledge came to him, and now rightly interpreting the horror he saw written in the colonel's countenance, and goaded thus to a fresh fit of fury, too despairing and violent even for words, he, with an inarticulate moan or whimper, rushed blindly forward with extended arms to attack his enemy. But the colonel, who had foreseen this onslaught, stepped quickly to one side, and, as he did so, quite overpowered by disgust, he could not resist the temptation of giving the hostile monster a violent push with his heavy walking-stick—a thrust of far greater force than he had indeed intended, for it caused the man to totter and fall forward just as two or three sailors, who from a distance had witnessed the last incidents of the dispute, ran up and stood between the adversaries.

“That man,” exclaimed the colonel in German, pointing with his stick to where the Moldavian lay sprawling on his knees, hastily readjusting the muffler around his hideous face, “tried to assault me, and I defended myself. Look after him, but beware of him. He is a wild beast,

not a man!" The men looked at the colonel, whom they knew to be some important grandee held in great honour by their captain, and then at the shabby mass of black clothes sprawling on the deck, and then at each other, and marvelled greatly, open-mouthed, not knowing what to say or think or do.

"I shall see the captain about this to-morrow," continued Rowan. "But in the meantime, as I say, look after this—this—man, but beware of him!" and so speaking, he turned and strode away in the direction of his cabin.

Just before reaching the stairway he turned and looked back. There in the moonlight stood the man in black, gazing after him, the awful face hidden once more in the dirty muffler which was now stained on one side with the blood which came trickling down from a wound on the brow. As he saw the colonel turn, the man raised his clenched fist and shook it very slowly, solemnly, and deliberately,—the gesture of a warning and of a curse,—and the sailors, fearing further violence, closed around him. Then the colonel turned and went his way to bed. The following morning Rowan of course made his faithful Adams (who by the way was never astonished at anything, having acquired through long residence in the East the stolidity of the Oriental) fully acquainted with the strange

events of the preceding night, but charged him to say nothing to anybody.

"I have thought the matter over," said the colonel, "and have decided merely to tell the captain that I had a few words with the man, and in a heated moment struck him, and then give Pellegrini his excellency's address where we shall be for the next fortnight, so that if this man wants to communicate with me in any way, he can. Of course, any question of a duel with such a brute is absurd. I'd as soon accept a challenge from a stoat or a ferret. But after all, the initial fault was mine. This wretched creature is not responsible either for his face or for his manners, and I feel I owe him some reparation for my impertinent curiosity. So I'll just say a word to Pellegrini and give him our address at Djavil Pacha's, to give to this man if he requires it. I hope he won't attempt to assault me again to-day."

"I'll keep a sharp lookout he doesn't, sir," said Adams. But such precautions were unnecessary. Nothing more was seen of the Moldavian, who presumably was confined to his cabin by his wound, and the following morning at early dawn the colonel and his servant left the steamer at Rustchuck and took the train to Varna and the Black Sea, *en route* for the splendours of the Bosphorus.

CHAPTER II

FROM one end to the other of the Bosphorus, both on the coast of Europe and on the coast of Asia, are numerous little towns and villages—the *faubourgs*, as it were, of Constantinople—which, in the *belle saison*, are inhabited by members of the Turkish aristocracy and strangers of distinction; and in one of these, on the European side, within less than an hour's journey by steamboat from the Stamboul bridge, was situated the palace of Hippy Rowan's friend,—the whilom plunger of the Petit and Jockey Clubs,—the famous Djavil Pacha. Of the building we need say but little. It was white,—partly marble and partly wood, painted to resemble marble,—low, rambling, and commodious, but of no special style of architecture, and certainly not Turkish, or even Oriental, but rather Italian in its outward aspect. The principal beauty and advantage of the residence was the extensive garden which surrounded it, and which, rising in banks of flowers and verdure at the back, in front sloped down to a splendid marble terrace, washed by the waters of the Bosphorus, which led to the Pacha's private landing-place and quay, whereby was moored the private steam-

launch of his excellency. Djavil Pacha was a bachelor, kept no harem, and lived in European style, his head cook and the chief assistants of that artist having been imported direct from Bignon's, and the palace throughout furnished by a *tapisserie* from Paris, the only concession to Turkish prejudices which a careful observer might have remarked being the absence of statuary and paintings in the house—the Koran, as we know, forbidding the reproduction in painting of animate objects, and Djavil having, before leaving the French capital, disposed of his splendid canvases and marbles in the Rue Drouot—whether induced to make this sacrifice by religious motives or for more sordid reasons, who shall say? In Constantinople—which, by the way, is the most backbiting, tittle-tattling, scandal-mongering little village in the world—the ex-ambassador and old Parisian *viveur* was greatly blamed for living in so thoroughly European a fashion, keeping open house, constantly entertaining the most distinguished members, male and female, of the European colony, and, in fact, conducting his life by the Bosphorus very much on the same lines as any man of wealth and refinement might conduct his by the Seine, the Danube, the Neva, or the Thames. The clever and ambitious Djavil, however, cared nothing for

such disapproval, so long as he retained the favour of the Sultan and the Grand Vizier (the gambler and *roué* of the Rue Royale and Rue Scribe having now developed into a hard-working Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs); he quite determined to live his private life as he pleased, since he devoted his public life to the service of his country, and when the day's work was over and he embarked on his steam-launch on his return journey to his palace, to leave behind him the Turkish statesman and become again purely and simply the cosmopolitan man of pleasure.

Of other permanent guests beside himself at the palace, Hippy found but three—his old friend, a well-known gambler and breaker and taker of banks, Lord Melrose; an amusing French newspaper man, Emile Bertonneux by name, of the Paris *Œil de Bœuf*; and last, but not least, the universally-popular Tony Jeratzesco, whom Hippy had last seen in the Birdcage at Newmarket some months before, and whose sudden and mysterious disappearance from St. James's Street, which loved him so well, in order to (as rumour asserted) go and take possession of a property just left him in some outlandish country by a recently-deceased relation, was still the talk of London. Not that London had any reason to be astonished at anything, whether good or evil, that

might befall the popular sportsman; for Tony Jeratzesco was altogether a mystery, and nobody knew anything whatever about the man familiarly nicknamed "Cheery and Cheeky," whether he was rich or poor, married or single, patrician by birth or plebeian, nor indeed of what nationality he might boast himself to be, whether Austrian, Hungarian, Bohemian, Pole, Moldavian, Russian, Wallachian, Servian, Bulgarian, or Montenegrin—Jew, Christian, Mohammedan, Buddhist, or what not. He was good-looking, amiable, refined, and well-dressed, and moreover, was endowed to a very marked degree with the rare and precious gift of being able to both win and lose money admirably well; in no wise allowing either the smiles or frowns of fortune to disturb the serene reign of the perfect good taste which presided over all his affairs; and when this had been said, and the facts chronicled, that he was fond of cards and racing, and always seemed to have plenty of money to justify his interest in both these expensive forms of speculation, and that he enjoyed a close personal friendship with some of the most exalted personages of the realm—the authentic data wherewith to compose a biographical sketch of Count Jeratzesco would be perhaps exhausted, although of course scandal, both benevolent and malignant, was constantly taking up the wondrous tale of the great success

of this mysterious stranger and adventurer in the best of our rude island society, and enriching it with rare and marvellous broideries of fancy. For once, however, rumour, in dealing with the private affairs of "Cheery and Cheeky," would appear to have been correct. A relative had died—an uncle—and left Tony a mysterious castle and many acres in Moldavia, not far from the little town of Sereth, and the count had come on to stay with Djavil solely because he knew Hippy Rowan, Lord Melrose, and others *ejusdem farinae*, would be gathered together under the Pacha's hospitable roof-tree, and he was desirous of making up a house-warming party of friends to accompany him to his new possessions, and enjoy some of the shooting for which the place was famous. This plan met with general approval, and Jeratzesco found no difficulty in forming a pleasant party to return with him to Moldavia from among the Pacha's numerous guests. For although, as we have said, Dick Rowan, Lord Melrose, the Count, and the French *chroniqueur*, were the only permanent residents beneath the Pacha's roof during this fortnight, the four remaining guest-chambers in the palace were never empty; for Djavil's house was literally Liberty Hall, and there was a constant ebb and flow of all kinds of persons there, more or less invited by the Pacha: people

from our Embassy, and people from every other Embassy, people of every rank and position :— from a very Broad-Church English divine, who was sent on out of sheer mischief by our ambassador, Lord Malling, and who came, accompanied by his florid, comely, and substantial spouse, both inclined to be slightly querulous about the Holy Places, until they had tasted the water-drinking Djavil's incomparable Yquem; she, indeed, almost brought at length to forget the Turkish woman's burning wrongs in the delightful *dulchatz* served in dainty silver saucers; but he, more robust in faith, finding it helpful to let his soul occasionally carol bracing and encouraging snatches from "Hymns Ancient and Modern," as healthy Anglican protests against the errors of the Crescent, even though his lips, engaged in negotiation with the Moslem's woodcock, of a necessity remained silent,—to a very beautiful and wayward Italian diva, who came accompanied by two of her adorers, likewise blest with the gift of song, and who made everyone weep (including the *chef* from Bignon's, who listened outside) when she and her friends after dinner (and all three slightly intoxicated) interpreted, as only angels fired with a few goblets of St. Marceaux can, Verdi's divine Requiem;—persons of both sexes, and of every nationality and religion, who would arrive in time

for dinner one evening, stay the night, and perhaps the following day and night, and then disappear without thinking of subjecting their host to a formal leave-taking, being well aware that his excellency's time was very precious, since he was up and about by six o'clock every morning, and very often steaming down in the direction of Stamboul to look after the foreign affairs of the empire before many of his guests had awakened from their slumbers. So pleasantly did the time pass that it was with regret Colonel Rowan saw the termination of his visit drawing nigh, and heard one morning Jeratzesco, impatient to assume his unwonted rôle of host, solemnly announce that in four days' time he should depart to his home in Karpaks, taking with him the followers he had selected. Then, to celebrate the approaching departure of the popular Hippy Rowan, Djavil gave a sylvan picnic, which for many months after was the subject of much gossip on both sides of the Bosphorus, and from the Black Sea to the Sea of Marmora—an entertainment destined, alas! to be fraught with fatal consequences to the gentleman in whose honour it was given. The rendezvous was for ten o'clock in the morning, at the "sweet waters of Asia,"—there where an insignificant little streamlet loses itself in the Bosphorus,—and the guests, about twenty in

number, arrived at the place of meeting with surprising punctuality—some coming with Djavil in his steam-launch, and some from Constantinople.

But for our limited space we would introduce each one of these somewhat notable individualities singly to our readers:—Leopold Maryx, the dissipated and irregular and eccentric savant, the renowned specialist for nervous diseases, who had been summoned from Vienna on purpose to see the Sultan ; Lord Malling, our delightful but impossible ambassador, accompanied by such representatives of the power and supremacy of Great Britain as the wicked and sempiternally-beautiful Dowager Duchess of Brompton, who, since the close of the Crimean War, had been giving her undivided attention to an exhaustive study of the Eastern Question, her head reclining on the shoulders of two successive generations of susceptible attachés ; Lord, and especially Lady, Brentford, the champion political bore in petticoats, the victim to high principles, who had bullied her half-witted husband into believing he had a conscience on the occasion of the Reform Bill of 1867, and expressing his delighted surprise at the discovery of his novel possession in a fashion so offensive to his party as to have merited and brought about his final extinction at the hands of “the impetuous earl, the Rupert

of debate," and who, since then, had been dedicating her life to impotent though vigorous denunciations of what she termed the "treachery" of the Tory county members, and the "infamy" of the county caucus; Mr. Leonard P. Beacon, the New York millionaire and sportsman, a rough, boasting, but withal good-hearted giant, who, although vulgar beyond even the power of dynamite to purify, was vastly amusing, owing to the fact of his having only begun his boisterous youth at the age of forty-five (he had been a collier till then), and who thus at fifty experienced the delightful surprises of a lad of eighteen, and confided them to you with a frankness which would even have brought blushes to the cheeks of Jean Jacques; Frank Silveyra, the famous Hebrew financier and prince of good fellows, from Vienna, and his friend, the no-less-delightful young Jew millionaire and artist, Raphael Sciana; the smart and enterprising little Alec Torquati, who had won our Derby at far-distant Epsom the previous year with "Kyber"; and, finally, three very beautiful and witty, and altogether attractive, ladies of high degree from Paris, who, accompanied by their husbands, had come all the way from the Seine to the Bosphorus on purpose to be admired, and three very magnificent young Cavaliers of the Guard who had come all the way from the Neva to the Bosphorus

on purpose to admire them and manifest their admiration. Ten carriages awaited Djavil's guests on the Asian coast, and into nine of these they clambered; the tenth and last being reserved for a valet-de-chambre provided with all that could be required for the dispensing of light refreshments *en route*. And thus, with servants of the Pacha mounted on faultless little Arab horses racing up and down on either side of the carriages, bringing every now and then from the hindmost vehicle fruit and sandwiches, and bottles of champagne and Bordeaux wherewith the weary travellers might be refreshed, this gay and brilliant party dashed into the interior of Asia at full gallop. It had been arranged that the *déjeuner champêtre* should take place in the forest of Alem-Dagh; and when, after a drive at steeplechase speed for about three hours' duration, this spot was reached, it was indeed made manifest that Djavil had neglected nothing to make this fantastic breakfast a success. Here, to this wild, deserted, picturesque spot in the heart of a forest in Asia, a romantic nook apparently miles away from any trace of European civilisation, this very *grand seigneur* had sent the evening before—accompanied by an army of *marmitons*—his *cordon bleu*, whose education had been perfected in the famous kitchen on the corner of the *Chaussée d'Antin* and the Boule-

vard des Italiens; and with this great artist and his assistants had come vast and numerous vans drawn by bullocks, and containing all the requisites for cooking, and the food, and wine, and silver, and decorations, and furniture—in fact, all that could be imagined by a wealthy and experienced voluptuary and man of the world to be necessary to make this *déjeuner sur l'herbe* for twenty persons an entertainment worthy of both host and guests. The viands provided by Djavil (who, being a Turk, possessed that stubborn and rough Oriental palate which apparently can never be trained to a proper appreciation of the most precious and delicate secrets and traditions of *la grande cuisine*) were of a very substantial character; but the long journey had aroused appetites wholly beyond the power of sandwiches and goblets of St. Marceaux to satisfy, and the Pacha's guests eagerly sought consolation in the introductory *aufs à la Béchamel*, as a hidden orchestra of the best musicians to be found in Constantinople ravished the Asian air with heaven-inspired passages telling of the jealousy of *Amneris* and of the ill-fated love of Radamès and Aïda.

“This is the most perfect still champagne I ever drank! Where did you get it, Djavil?” And so speaking, Mr. Leonard P. Beacon put down his glass and felt in his pocket for the notebook

wherein he was accustomed to inscribe such precious addresses. Life at best is short, but he, Mr. Leonard P. Beacon, had, to speak Hibernicè, only begun when already half through it; and as he always wanted the best of everything and had no time to lose in personal quests after supreme excellence, he was always glad to take advantage of short cuts through the experience of friends. But the good-natured and adipose Pacha shook his head and smiled.

“No, no, *mon cher*. ’Tis a secret. Were I to tell you, you’d buy it all up and take it back with you to America. But, if you like it, I daresay I can spare you a few dozen. Ask Hassan yourself.”

Here a very high-pitched “Oh! how terrible!” from Lady Brentford disturbed the wit-winged chatter of the three lovely Seine-side dames with their three adoring flowers of Slav chivalry; disturbed the husbands of these dames, who were engaged in an animated discussion among themselves as to the merits of cooking in oil; disturbed the Dowager Duchess, who, while listening to Raphael Sciamas’s enthusiastic account of the priceless Giulio Clovio he had unearthed a fortnight before in Venice, had been endeavouring, and not without success, to rekindle by means of a visual current of sympathy with the youthful Alec Torquati the flame of passion in those orbs which had first flashed

with that all-devouring fire early in the fifties ; disturbed Tony Jeratezesco, who was explaining some Newmarket matters to Baron Silveyra, while Lord Brentford and our ambassador listened ; and disturbed, in fact, the original cause of this disturbing cry, the loud-voiced Leopold Maryx, whose remarks to Hippy Rowan had elicited this startling exclamation from Lady Brentford, who sat next to him and had overheard them.

“Dr. Maryx is saying such awful things,” said her ladyship, shaking her head. “He says he believes in people being possessed of devils.” Then, even as she spoke, her mind reverted to the terrible events of 1867, those famous “Resolutions” and the way the borough members had been treated, and she felt that the great professor might not perhaps after all be mistaken.

“Ah, no! you misunderstood me, Lady Brentford!” exclaimed Maryx, laughing. “What I said was, I saw no reason why, if people were ever possessed of evil spirits, as we are told they used to be, we should believe such things to be impossible now. Is the world any better now than it was on the day when the swine ran down that steep place and were choked in the lake? I didn’t say that I believe in such things, for I don’t; but, certainly, if I believed they ever existed, I should think they were as likely to exist now as ever.”

"Maryx was telling me about the children of Judas," remarked Hippy Rowan, by way of explanation.

"The children of Judas!" echoed Emile Bertonneux, the Parisian newspaper man, scenting a possible *article à sensation*—for it is, we suppose, hardly necessary to remind our readers that in so cosmopolitan a gathering the conversation was carried on in French—"Who are they? I had no idea that Judas was a *père de famille*."

"It's a Moldavian legend," replied the great specialist. "They say that children of Judas, lineal descendants of the arch traitor, are prowling about the world seeking to do harm, and that they kill you with a kiss."

"Oh, how delightful!" murmured the Dowager Duchess, glancing at Alec Torquati, as if inviting, and indeed expecting, just such homicidal osculatory cruelty at the lips of the young Derby winner.

"But how do they get at you to kiss you?" gasped Mr. Leonard P. Beacon, his thirst for information leading him to ignore the fact that his mouth was full of *loup sauce homard*.

"The legend is," said Maryx, "that in the first instance they are here in every kind of shape—men and women, young and old, but generally of extraordinary and surpassing ugliness, but are here merely to fill their heart with

envy, venom, and hatred, and to mark their prey. In order to really do harm, they have to sacrifice themselves to their hatred, go back to the infernal regions whence they came,—but go back by the gate of suicide,—report to the chief of the three princes of evil, get their diabolical commission from him, and then return to this world and do the deed. They can come back in any form they think the best adapted to attain their object, or rather satisfy their hate: sometimes they come as a mad dog, who bites you and gives you hydrophobia—that's one form of the kiss of Judas; sometimes as the breath of pestilence, cholera, or what not—that's another form of the kiss of Judas; sometimes in an attractive shape, and then the kiss is really as one of affection, though as fatal in its effect as the mad dog's bite or the pestilence. When it takes the form of a kiss of affection, however, there is always a mark on the poisoned body of the victim—the wound of the kiss. Last summer, when I was at Sinaia in attendance on the Queen, I saw the body of a peasant girl whose lover had given her the kiss of Judas, and there certainly was on her neck a mark like this," and Maryx took up a fork and scratched on the tablecloth three X's, thus, XXX. "Can you guess what that's supposed to signify?" inquired the great physician.

"It looks like a hurdle," remarked Torquati.

"Thirty," exclaimed Lady Brentford.

"Of course," replied Maryx, "thirty—the thirty pieces of silver, of course—the mark of the price of blood."

"*Vous êtes impayable, mon cher!*" exclaimed Djavil, grinning. "Whenever you find it no longer pays you to kill your patients you can always make money at the *foires*. Set Hippy Rowan to beat the drum at the door and you sit inside the van telling your wonderful *blagues*, and you'll make a fortune in no time."

"I hope you don't tell those horrible tales to the Sultan, Leopold," said Lord Malling, laughing. "You cure nervous diseases by frightening people to death, I think."

But the great professor paid no attention to these flippant remarks; he was, indeed, notwithstanding his marvellous intelligence and extraordinary science and experience and skill, at very heart a charlatan and mountebank in his love of a gaping crowd; and the interest he saw depicted on the faces of his listeners delighted him.

"Did you say that in the first instance these children of Judas are supposed to be very ugly?" inquired Colonel Rowan, his thoughts reverting to the awful face of that man, Isaac Lebedenko, who had assaulted him on the boat.

The incident had almost wholly passed away from his memory until then, though he had noted it down in his carefully-kept diary ; and he had, by the way, long ago told himself that he must have been mistaken in what he thought that horrible muffler had disclosed to him ; that such things could not be, and that he must have been deceived either by some trick of shadow, or by some prank played on him by gout astride of his imagination.

“ Yes,” replied Maryx ; “ so runs the legend. This physical ugliness betokens, of course, the malignant spirit within. At that stage they may be recognised and avoided or, better still, slain ; for they only really become dangerous when their hatred has reached such a pitch that they are prompted to seek a voluntary death and reincarnation in order completely to satisfy their malignancy ; for it is by the gate of suicide alone that they can approach the arch-fiend to be fully commissioned and equipped to return to earth on their errand of destruction. So if they are killed in their first stage of development, and not allowed to commit suicide, they are extinguished. When they return fully armed with power from hell, it is too late ; they cannot be recognised, and are fatal—for they have at their command all the weapons and artillery of Satan, from the smile of a pretty woman to the breath

of pestilence. This voluntary self-sacrifice of hate in order to more fully satisfy itself by a regeneration, this suicide on the *reculer pour mieux sauter* principle, is of course nothing but a parody of the divine sacrifice of Love on which the Christian religion is based."

"I'm both sorry and astonished, my dear Leopold," said Baron Silveyra, smiling, "to see that your knowledge of diabolical matters is so faulty. How can you speak of three princes of evil? You must know there are seventy-two!"

"Ah! you believe in the old system," rejoined Maryx, laughing, and pouring himself out a tumblerful of Mouton Rothschild: "six multiplied by twelve, and then the seven million four hundred and five thousand nine hundred and twenty-six demons of inferior rank. But, *mon cher*, that's altogether out of fashion now; that brings you to six multiplied by one million two hundred and thirty-four thousand three hundred and twenty-one, or the old mysterious 'tetrad' of Pythagoras and Plato counting both ways.¹

¹ Perhaps the meaning of the professor will be more apparent if we put the numbers in figures. He speaks of 72 princes of darkness (6 multiplied by 12) and 7,405,926 demons of an inferior rank. This last number, so strange apparently, is still the product of 6 multiplied by 1,234,321; and, as our readers can see, 1,234,321 presents to us both from right to left and from left to right the four numbers constituting the mysterious "tetrad" of Pythagoras and of Plato.

We've altogether changed that down in Hades now." And then the great savant, who delighted above all things in gravely clothing nonsense in a garb of erudition, launched forth into a fantastic and witty description of the internal economy of the kingdom of Satan, a satire in which he not only displayed an extraordinary amount of mystical knowledge, but which he enlivened by sly and apposite allusions to the Governments represented by Djavil and Lord Malling respectively ; and these gentlemen replying to this banter in the same spirit, and appealing to the other guests, the conversation soon became general.

When the repast was at length over, every one began strolling about the woods, and Hippy Rowan, lighting a cigar, started for a ramble with his old friend Lord Malling. But they had not gone far when their host sent a servant after them to request his lordship to return and speak with him ; and so, the ambassador turning back, Hippy continued his saunter by himself, penetrating by degrees into a somewhat remote and secluded part of the forest, the voices and laughter of the other guests becoming gradually fainter and fainter as he strolled on. Suddenly, from behind a tree, a man sprang out upon him, and a knife gleamed in the sunlight, swiftly descending upon his heart. Hippy, quick as lightning

leapt to one side, striking up as he did so with his heavy walking-stick at the would-be assassin's arm, and with such force that he sent the knife flying out of the man's hand into the air; and then turning, he dealt the villain a blow on the side of the head which brought him to the ground as one dead. It was the Moldavian, Isaac Lebedenko. Hippy had recognised the eyes gleaming over the dirty-white muffler the moment the man sprang out upon him; and now, as he lay on the ground insensible, there could of course be no shadow of doubt about the man's identity, although he had so fallen on one side that the wrapper had not been disarranged from his face. We have said that, although enjoying the well-merited reputation of being the best-natured man in London, Dick Rowan had laid himself open to the reproach of having been most unduly harsh and severe in the numerous wars in which he had been engaged; and this hardness, not to say cruelty, presumably ever latent in his nature, but which seemed only to be called to the surface under certain special conditions closely connected with peril and the excitement engendered thereby, now made itself apparent. The Moldavian had fallen on his side, and the shock of his fall had been so violent that, while one hand lay palm upwards and half open on the trunk of a large

fallen tree, the other hand, palm downwards, had been thrown upon its fellow. It was rather a peculiar position for the shock resulting from a fall to have thrown the hands into, and of course indicated that the blow had been so severe that the man had not been able to make any attempt to break his fall, but had sunk to the ground like a doll. Such, at least, was the way Rowan explained the matter as he stood over his prostrate enemy, wondering in his mind how he could possibly contrive to secure the violent would-be assassin until such time as he should be able to obtain assistance and have him handed over to the authorities for punishment ; and just as he noticed the position of his hands his eyes caught the gleaming of the knife, which had fallen a little farther on in the grass. Hippy went to where it lay and picked it up. It was a murderous-looking weapon indeed : broad, double-edged, and very sharp, though rather thick and not long, and fitted with a big round handle of lead, destined, of course, to lend terrible momentum to any blow struck by it. Rowan looked at the knife, and then at the hands of the Moldavian, lying in so diabolically tempting a position ; and just then a quivering of the man's legs plainly indicated that he was recovering his senses. If it was to be done at all there was evidently no time to be lost, so

Rowan, taking the sharp instrument, and poisoning it point downwards over the man's hands, which were already beginning to twitch with returning consciousness, and using his huge walking-stick as a hammer, with one powerful blow on the broad heavy handle of the knife, drove it through both the hands of the Moldavian and into the trunk of the tree up to the very hilt. A slight and almost inaudible groan came from behind the white wrapper—that was all; but Rowan could see that under the sting of the sudden pain the man had completely recovered consciousness, for the awful eyes, just visible above the muffler, were now open and fixed upon him.

“You miserable scoundrel!” exclaimed Rowan in German, his voice hoarse with anger. “You may think yourself lucky I didn't kill you like a dog when you lay there at my mercy. But I'll have you punished—never fear. Lie quiet there until I have you sent for to be put in prison.”

The man said nothing; his awful eyes simply looked at Rowan. “I have been forced, as you see,” continued the colonel, leisurely taking out a cigar and lighting it, “to nail you to the tree to prevent your escaping. Vermin is often treated so, you know. But I shan't inconvenience you for long. In a very few minutes I shall be sending people to unpin you and bind you properly, and have you taken off to prison.

We have not seen the last of each other yet, my good friend—believe me, we have not.”

Then the man spoke—it was almost in a whisper, but the words came with the horrible liquid lisp Rowan remembered with so much disgust. “No,” he murmured, “we have not seen the last of each other yet—we have not.”

“There’s but little fear, I fancy, of your not being here when I send for you,” resumed Rowan, after a moment’s pause, during which he and the Moldavian had been steadfastly gazing at each other. “So we needn’t waste more time now, and especially as you must be rather uncomfortable. So *à bientôt*.” Then, just as he was turning away, he stopped. “In case,” said he very quietly, “you should succeed in wriggling away before I send for you, and prefer mutilating your hands to suffering the very many lashes I shall certainly have administered to you, it’s as well you should know, perhaps, that when travelling I invariably carry a revolver. I’m without it to-day—very luckily for you—by the merest accident. But I’m not likely to forget it again. So take care.” And then Rowan turned and began strolling very leisurely back to where he had left his friends. His last words had not been idly spoken, but were intended to first of all suggest to the miserable wretch whom he had left nailed to the fallen tree, that escape

was not altogether impossible, provided he were ready to pay the terrible price of self-mutilation required ; and, secondly, to indicate the humiliating nature and severity of the punishment in store for him, that he might decide whether escape at any cost were not preferable to such torture and degradation. For, as a matter of fact, Hippy Rowan, directly the first moment of anger and the accompanying spasm of malignant cruelty had passed away, had decided in his mind to proceed no further in the matter, and by no means to take upon himself the ennui and trouble of having the paltry villain more seriously punished than he had already been. Had he had his revolver with him, he would of course have killed the man ; but as it was, he had nailed him as vermin to a tree in a lonely forest in Asia, and there he would leave him to his fate. He might starve to death there, or escape by a terrible mutilation, or possibly with his teeth remove the knife ; or somebody might happen to pass by and relieve him, though this last was hardly likely : but at all events he, Hippy Rowan, having warned the villain what to expect in the event of his again molesting him, would have nothing more to do with the matter, and, indeed, not even mention the disagreeable episode to his friends—at least, not at present.

When Rowan got back to the scene of the picnic, he found the preparations for departure just being completed; and in a few minutes all Djavil's guests were once more comfortably ensconced in the carriages and on their way back to the Bosphorus, but this time by another road, which their host had reserved as an agreeable surprise, and which led through scenery of great beauty—first, after fairy vistas of sylvan solitudes and entanglements, through a squalid though picturesque little village, the inhabitants of which, men and women and children, came running out after the carriages in great excitement, calling out and holding up their hands for alms; then past an encampment of tziganes, who were singing and playing and dancing; then across a lonely plain, over which here and there in the far distance, and standing out in bold relief against the horizon, now all ablaze with the glory of the setting sun, passed bullock carts full of peasants, grouped together with Oriental and artistic grace, going home after the day's toil; and then at last, as the sun disappeared to their left behind the islands of the Sea of Marmora, to where the splendid panorama of the Bosphorus bathed in twilight lay at their feet. There, by the waterside, the party broke up—all but those persons staying with Djavil going back to Constantinople in a steamboat

provided for their convenience by their host, and the others, including of course Hippy Rowan, returning to the Pacha's palace in his excellency's steam-launch.

The scene returning home was beautiful indeed, but so familiar to Colonel Rowan that the loveliness of what he saw could hardly have been the sole and only cause of the deep feeling of melancholy which stole over him as he walked the deck and heard the music of the orchestra, which the others were taking back with them to Constantinople, growing fainter and fainter in the distance. It was quite night, and the sea was very quiet, for after sundown no boat leaves the Bosphorus, neither is any vessel allowed to enter therein before the dawn; so that the only sound which broke the stillness, when the music had died away in the distance, was the noise of the screw, which, working in the phosphorescent waters, rolled out showers and sheets of gold as the little steam-launch plodded, plodded, plodded on its course, cleaving and leaving on either side and behind a way of liquid fire. Above were the heavens sparkling with stars, below and around the sea of molten gold, while on either side on the silent banks of the Bosphorus gleamed and streamed innumerable lights from the different harem windows, at some one of which every now and then an inquisitive head would

appear, peeping out at the passing vessel. All Djavil's guests were tired ; so after dinner, and a little music and chatting, and some very harmless gambling, they retired to rest much earlier than usual, Rowan being indeed glad when the time came that, unobserved and alone, he could deliver himself up wholly to his reflections, which, as we have said, happened that night to be of a strangely melancholy complexion. His rooms were on the ground floor, the windows indeed opening out on to the garden which sloped down to the marble terrace bordering the Bosphorus ; and since it was to meditate rather than to sleep that Rowan sought retirement, and as it was early and the night divine, the colonel, when he had sent the faithful Adams to bed, lit a cigar and went out, descending to the waterside to enjoy the view. Hardly had he reached the terrace, however, when from the farther end of it, which lay in shadow, emerged, crawling in the moonlight along the white marble pavement, an awful figure, which he knew but too well—that of Isaac Lebedenko the Moldavian, the man whom he had left but a few hours before nailed to a tree in the forest in Asia. As Rowan saw the man, the man saw him ; and as Hippy stepped back and hurriedly felt in his pocket for his revolver, remembering, even as he did so, that he had left that useful weapon on his dress-

ing-table, the Moldavian drew himself up and sprang towards his enemy, pulling, as he advanced, with one hand the muffler from his face, and disclosing with hideous distinctness in the moonlight the indescribable horror of that countenance of a monster not born of woman, while with the other he fumbled in his pocket.

“The only way!” he gasped, in lisping German—“the only way! But I am ready—glad; for I shall come to you now and you cannot escape me! See!” And so saying, and before Rowan could realise what was taking place, the man stabbed himself to the heart, and with a loud groan fell backwards into the waters of the Bosphorus, which closed over him.

CHAPTER III

“AND you say you were not frightened?” exclaimed Bertonneux of the *Œil de Bœuf*.

Hippy Rowan shook his head and smiled. “No, of course not,” he said. Then he added, lowering his voice lest the others should hear him, “Do you know, it’s a strange thing *mon cher*, that never in my life have I known what fear is. It’s no boast, of course, but a fact; and you can ask anyone who’s been with me in

danger. There are plenty of them about, for I began with Inkermann and only ended with Candahar, not to speak of innumerable little private adventures more or less unpleasant between times, like the one I've just been telling you about, in fact. You know me well enough to know that I'm neither a fool nor a coxcomb, and as a matter of fact this is not exactly courage, I fancy, but rather an absolute inability to entertain such a sentiment as fear. Just as some people are born blind and deaf and dumb."

The scene was an immense and lofty chamber, luxuriously furnished, half drawing-room and half smoking-room, in Tony Jeratczesco's house in Moldavia, in the Krapak Mountains, and the time about a month after the events had taken place recorded in the last chapter. It had been raining all day, as it only can rain in the Danubian principalities, and so the sportsmen had been unable to get out: a particularly deplorable *contretemps*, seeing that, with the exception of the small contingent which had come on from the Bosphorus, and which included Rowan, the French journalist, Lord Melrose, the three very magnificent Cavaliers of the Guard from the shores of the Neva, and Mr. Leonard P. Beacon, the guests of "Cheery and Checky," were wild, rough, and boisterous neighbouring magnates, many of whom had never travelled beyond

Bucharest, and none of whom possessed any of those very rare and precious qualities of heart and head, a combination of which in a fellow-captive can alone reconcile us to the common chain. These boyars were indeed so inconceivably rough and uncouth that Tony Jeratzesco greatly regretted having, on the occasion of his taking possession of his property, conformed to the almost feudally hospitable custom of the country, and invited these loud-voiced Nimrods and their retainers to take up their residence under his roof-tree for such time as the sport in the neighbourhood might meet with their approval. As it was, however, the mistake had been made: these strange beings had been asked and had come, and the evil was past recall; and although at certain times, and especially after dinner, and when the alcohol began to lift its voice, the society of the wealthy barbarians became almost unendurable, it had, of course, to be put up with and made the best of; all that Tony's more civilised friends could do being, almost in self-defence, as it were, to keep to themselves as much as was possible without risking giving offence to their unpleasant fellow-guests by this reserve. The house-party was composed entirely of men, which of course did not add to the refinement of the gathering; and when, as at the beginning of this chapter, the tedium of a

long and rainy day, thoroughly saturated with alcohol and tobacco, had reached the hour preceding midnight, the atmosphere of Jeratzesco's salon, either from an ethical or from a purely social point of view, would assuredly have compared unfavourably with that of most drawing-rooms in Mayfair. To the French journalist Rowan had already told the story of his horrible adventure with Isaac Lebedenko and of the man's suicide—all of which events, together with minutes of what Maryx had said about the children of Judas, were found carefully noted down in the colonel's diary after his death, from which source of information and the testimony of Adams, the present authentic account of the strange facts is taken ;—but Mr. Leonard P. Beacon not having heard the story before, Hippy had been prevailed upon to repeat it to him, the question and answer with which this chapter opens being the immediate consequences of the telling of this tale.

Hippy had spoken in a low tone, to avoid attracting attention ; but he had not taken into consideration the boisterous nature of his American auditor, who now exclaimed at the top of his voice—"What ! do you mean seriously to tell me, Rowan, that you have never known what fear is ? that you simply can't be frightened by anything ?"

Annoying as it was, under the circumstances, to have such a question put in so trumpet-tongued a fashion, Hippy plainly saw that the American would insist upon a reply to his thundered query, and that it would in nowise better matters to delay giving it.

"I do," said he simply; and then added, in a half-whisper, "I wish you wouldn't yell so, Beacon."

But it was too late; the half-tipsy boyars, bored to death and eager to seize upon any topic of conversation likely to furnish a pretext for much violence of language, had heard the question and the answer, and an uproar ensued which Jeratzesco was powerless to quell, and in the course of which the amiability and good breeding of Dick Rowan were both put to a severe test by the clumsy banter and coarsely-expressed incredulity of these uncouth noblemen. One gentleman especially, a certain Prince Valerian Eldourdza, who, owing to the fact of his having been educated at a lycée in Paris, was looked upon as the Admirable Crichton of that part of Moldavia, pressed Hippy very hard, plying him with most personal and impertinent questions as to his belief in a future life, future punishment, the devil, and so forth, and at last, indeed, going so far as to solemnly declare that not only did he not believe in Colonel Rowan's

inability to experience terror, but that he would himself undertake, under a penalty of £4000, to frighten him. This somewhat offensive boast had, in the first instance, fallen from Eldourdza's lips in the heat of excitement, and probably without the speaker himself attaching any very great meaning or importance to his words; but the statement having been received with vociferous approval by the other boyars, his highness had been constrained to repeat the bet, and the second time give it a more specific form. "One hundred thousand francs," he repeated, bringing his very small and very unclean fist down on the table with much violence, "that I frighten you, colonel, before you leave here—that is, of course, always provided you're not leaving at once."

"My friend is staying with me another month," interposed Jeratzesco rather angrily. "But I can't allow such bets to be made in my house, Eldourdza. I hate practical jokes—we have quite enough of that kind of folly in England."

"They're afraid already!" sneered a very unpleasant-looking old Moldavian statesman, all lip and nose, chewing at his cigar in the corner of his mouth after the fashion of a dog with a bone.

"You leave this to me, Tony," said Rowan to his host, speaking quickly, and in English; then, turning to Eldourdza—"Let's understand each

other plainly, prince. What do you mean by fright? Of course you can startle me by jumping out from a dark corner, or any trick of that kind. I make no bet about that kind of thing, of course; but I'll bet you an even hundred thousand francs, if you like, or a hundred and fifty thousand francs, that you don't make me experience what is generally and by everyone understood by the word fright—a sentiment of fear, or of anything even remotely resembling fear. How shall we define it, for we must be clear on this point?"

"Hair standing on end and teeth chattering," suggested Mr. Leonard P. Beacon, who was greatly delighted at the turn affairs had taken, foreseeing an adventure and new experience of some kind.

"Exactly," replied Eldourdza, who had been consulting in a whisper with his friends, and absorbing yet another gobletful of champagne strongly laced with brandy. "Let those very words be used if you like—I'll bet you an even hundred and fifty thousand francs—two hundred thousand if you like" (Hippy nodded), "that before you leave this place, four weeks from to-day, you will be so frightened that your hair will stand on end, your teeth will chatter, and what's more, you'll call for help."

"Very well," assented Rowan, laughing, "*C'est*

entendu; but I shan't make you go so far as that, my dear prince. I shall be quite ready to pay up if you do more than merely startle me in the way I spoke of just now—by some sudden noise, or jumping out at me, or some such silly prank. Anything even approaching fear, much less terror, of course, and I pay up at once. And," he added good-naturedly—for he was fond of winning money, and the certainty of this £8000 was very pleasant to him—"luckily for you, Eldourza, I happen to have the money to pay with if I lose. I was on every winner the last day at Baden—couldn't do wrong—and sent it all on to Gunzburg at once, where it is intact, for I didn't want to be tempted to gamble till I got to the Yacht Club."

And so this strange bet was made, and duly noted down with the approval of all, even Jeratezesco withdrawing his objection when he saw the very evident satisfaction with which the colonel regarded what he felt sure to be the only possible result of this absurd wager. But if HippyRowan had foreseen the wholly-unexpected way in which this waiting day by day, night after night, and hour by hour, for the surprise—of course of an apparently unpleasant nature—which Eldourza and his friends must be preparing for him, had he, we say, foreseen the peculiar and unprecedented way in which this

really absurd suspense was destined to gradually, and by almost imperceptible degrees, affect his nerves in the course of the next month, he would most assuredly have let the prince's silly wager pass unnoticed. And what made this never-absent feeling of care, of perpetual caution, of unceasing vigilance, the more acutely irksome to Hippy was, that these quite novel sensations could be ascribed but to one altogether disagreeable and detestable cause—namely, the advance of old age. His experience of life had told him that the constitution of a man who had lived as he had lived was apt to break down suddenly, no matter how robust it might be apparently; the supports, the foundation, which kept the structure in its place and seemingly firm and upright, having been little by little, and very gradually but very surely, removed in the course of years, the nights of which had been worn to very morning in the fatigue of pleasure, and the days of which had been scornful of repose. He had seen innumerable friends of his, apparently as strong and vigorous as himself, suddenly give way in this fashion—fall down like a house of cards, as it were, and be swept away into the outer darkness. Could it be owing to the approach of some such sudden and disastrous conclusion to his mundane affairs, that he found day by day, as the next four weeks wore on, his

nerves, hitherto apparently of steel, becoming more and more unstrung by this suspense, the cause of which was in reality so utter puerile and contemptible? This was very certainly not his first experience of suspense: he had been in danger of his life very often, and on a few occasions this danger had been imminent for a considerable period of time, and yet never could he recall having felt before this uneasiness of mind, this perpetual questioning of his heart, which now, while merely waiting for these boorish savages to play some more or less gruesome, and even perhaps dangerous, practical joke on him, he experienced. So it must be old age; it could be nothing else—old age, and the beginning, perhaps, of a general breaking-up of the system; the first intimation, as it were, of the second and final payment being about to be required of him for those extravagances by Seine side already alluded to, those myrtles sacred to the sparrow-drawn goddess, those prolonged and oft-repeated saunters from midnight to dawn arm-in-arm with Bacchus and baccarat; such outriders of death's chariot, Rowan told himself, it must be that induced him, greatly to his own surprise, to waste so much of his time twisting and turning over in his mind all kinds of possible and impossible speculations as to how these wretched Moldavians were going to try and

frighten him, led him to carefully examine his apartments every night before retiring to rest, see that his revolver had not been tampered with and was safely under his pillow, and finally, indeed, and just before the end, brought about so chronic a condition of nervous restlessness as to render his seeking that pillow for purposes of prolonged repose, a mockery. Of course this very abnormal condition of mind, which in no wise even remotely resembled fear and was one merely of perpetual watchfulness, was of very gradual growth, and Hippy Rowan was throughout the whole course of its development, until just before the end, quite sufficiently master of himself to conceal his feelings, not only from his friends, but even from his valet, the omniscient Adams; and the very visible change in the colonel's appearance and manner, which by and by came to be remarked, was ascribed by all—and in a great measure justly ascribed—to a very severe chill which he caught shortly after the night of the wager, and which confined him to the house, and indeed to his room, for many days. Neither Prince Eldourza nor anyone else had made any even covert allusion, in Rowan's hearing, to the wager since the night on which it had been made and formally noted down; and this fact in itself, this studied silence, became in the course of time, and as Rowan's nervous irritability increased,

a source of annoyance to him, and induced him at length suddenly one morning, when they were all at breakfast together, to himself boldly allude to the matter, which was becoming more and more constantly uppermost in his mind.

"Pardon me, prince," said he, smiling, and with well-assumed carelessness, "if I allude to the matter of our wager, which you seem to have forgotten, for you have only ten days left now, and"—

"Plenty of time!" interrupted Eldourza roughly. "Forgotten it? Not I—have I?" he continued, turning to his friends. "You know whether I have forgotten it or not!" Significant and sinister grins and much shaking of heads in negation responded to this appeal—a pantomime which excited the colonel's curiosity not a little.

"Well," said he, "I'm glad to hear it, for I shouldn't like to take your money without your having had some semblance of a run for it. All I want to tell you was this, and I feel sure you'll agree with what I now say. Of course I've no idea what kind of prank you're going to play on me to endeavour to frighten me, but no doubt it will be as horrible and awful a thing as you can concoct, for I suppose you've no intention of making me a present of two hundred thousand francs."

“Certainly not!” laughed Prince Valerian ; “if you get it at all you’ll have to pay dear for it, believe me.”

“Very well,” replied Hippy, “anything you like ; but that’s just what I wanted to speak about. Of course I’m at your disposal to do anything you like with, and to try and frighten in any way and every way you can contrive ; but you can easily understand that there must be a limit to my endurance, otherwise you’d make me look like a fool. What I mean is, that you’re at perfect liberty, say, to send any ghost, or vampire, or wild beast, or devil, or anything else you can think of, to my room to try and frighten me, and for that purpose I am glad to lend you all the aid in my power. As it is, I leave my door unlocked every night now, as perhaps you know. But there must be some limit to this—I mean that your endeavour to frighten me must have some limit in time, and can’t go on for ever. Suppose we put it at one hour—for one hour let your ghost or devil do its worst ; then at the end of that time, if it has failed to frighten me, your goblin will become merely a nuisance, and I think I shall be justified in extinguishing it, don’t you ?”

“Most assuredly,” replied Eldourdza. “In less than an hour : we don’t ask for an hour—half an hour will do ; after half an hour you are

perfectly at liberty to do as you like—provided always,” he added grimly, “that by that time you are not half dead with fright.”

“Very well, then,” rejoined Hippy; “so that’s understood. After half an hour from the time your test, whatever it may be, begins, I shall be free to use any means I care to adopt to put a stop to this test, provided by that time, of course, I have not felt anything even remotely resembling alarm. As, in the event of your test being something really offensive and disagreeable to me, I should probably use my revolver, I thought it only fair to have this plainly understood, so that what is really only a silly practical joke may not, by a misunderstanding, end in a tragedy.”

The prince nodded in acquiescence. “You are quite right,” he said. “After half an hour do as you please. But you’re mistaken in looking upon this as a practical joke, Colonel Rowan; it will be no joke, and may indeed, even against your will, end in a tragedy.”

As may be readily imagined, these few mysterious words of menace from the man pledged to, in some way or other, cause him within ten days’ time to experience the novel, but doubtless unpleasant, sensation of terror, did not tend to bring the colonel to a more restful state of mind; and his never-ending speculations

as to what scheme these savages might perchance be planning wherewith to frighten him, began again after this conversation to torment his brain with renewed persistency. Of course, Eldourdza would do all he could to win his bet—not for the sake of the money, perhaps, for that could be nothing to him, but for the pleasure and delight of triumph; and, equally of course, at least so Hippy told himself, this desired fright the prince and his friends would only endeavour to bring about by some pseudo-supernatural agency, for they could hardly imagine that any of the vulgar dangers of life—say an attack of many adversaries, whether men or brutes, peril from water, fire, or what not, in fact, any of the thousand-and-one not uncommon evils which threaten human existence—could possibly affright so hardened and experienced a soldier and traveller as he was, a man whose record of perilous adventures was so well known. The supernatural, therefore, the terrors which owe their horror to the fact of their being inexplicable, the power of them unfathomable; the awful enemies which may be lurking crouched behind the last breath of life ready to spring upon us as the heart stops beating; such, or rather the semblance of such, would doubtless be alone the influences which these wild barbarians would seek to bring to bear upon his

nerves to try them. And when this probability had been suggested to his imagination, Colonel Rowan began recalling to mind all the gruesome stories he had ever heard of about ghosts, hobgoblins, and the like, his restlessness and nervous watchfulness (to which he only gave way when in the privacy of his own chamber of course) so increasing as the last ten days sped by, that at length Adams, who slept in the next room, remarking his master's condition, arranged, without of course the knowledge of anyone, to keep watch and ward over the colonel during these last few nights by means of an aperture high up in the wall, through which he could obtain a perfect view of his master's sleeping apartment, and see all that took place therein. And as this restlessness of the colonel,—whose general health, by the way, had been greatly impaired by the chill he had caught, and especially by the strong remedies he had taken to counteract its effects—although having nothing whatever in common with a sentiment of alarm, being merely indeed the natural result of the perpetual and fatiguing reiteration of the question in his mind, "In what absurd fashion are those uncouth boors going to try to frighten me? What is their idea of a very terrible thing, I wonder?"—although, as we say, his uneasiness partook in nowise of the nature of alarm, and he felt per-

fectly ready to entertain, at a moment's notice and with a smile, a whole army of ghosts and goblins, still, as this disquietude sprang from uncertainty and suspense, it naturally increased in acuteness as the time drew near when it must perforce cease altogether—give place to knowledge and experience, and, of course, amusement, triumph, and tranquillity. And thus it came to pass that, on the last night but two, Hippy never retired to rest until the dawn, having decided, after mature reflection, that no matter what absurd practical joke his friends might be going to play on him, he would cut a less ludicrous figure in his dressing-gown than in bed, and that it might indeed be advisable to be thus prepared to follow the tormenting masqueraders from his chamber to punish them elsewhere, and before the whole household, in the event of their conduct proving too outrageous. And so, after having as usual carefully examined every hole and cranny of his sleeping apartment (as the unobserved Adams from his peephole above very plainly saw him do), and lighted many tapers about the old-fashioned and vast chamber, and put many cheering logs upon the fire, the colonel lit a cigar and began pacing up and down the room, turning over of course in his mind the perpetual question, "What are these uncouth madmen going to do?" and the query

for ever followed by the usual reflection, "They can do as they please, provided they don't, by their folly, make me look a fool." There would probably be the rattling of chains and bones, and some very cleverly-contrived apparition; and even, in fact, some real danger, perhaps, for these men were really perfect savages, who would stop at nothing to attain their end; and Hippy would certainly not have been surprised to have found a box of dynamite concealed beneath his bed. "Luckily, this is the last night but two," he said to himself; "and after all, this bet has taught me one thing I never so plainly realised before, and in a certain sense I have really lost the wager, for there is one thing I am afraid of, and very much afraid of, more and more afraid of every minute, and that is being made a fool of." Then he stopped in his perambulation and stared at himself in the looking-glass. Yes; he was certainly growing old: the grey hairs he cared nothing about—they were entirely insignificant, and the crows' feet and wrinkles were of no importance—they did not in the least annoy him; but the eyes, ah! the eyes were losing their light,—that light that had disported itself over so many beautiful things, and for so many years, was now being withdrawn,—going perhaps to join the fair and dear and dead, or indeed worse than dead, women

who had inspired its most brilliant and most ardent scintillations. But then even a youthful face would look sad in so mystic a mirror—for it was very old and evidently Venetian, and had doubtless been in that room, in that castle, in that remote corner of Moldavia, for years, and seen perchance strange things, and was destined, (who could tell?) before three nights were over, to reflect images of even more fantastic terror than had ever darkened it before. What a pity that this old looking-glass could not recall some of the most pleasant images that had been reflected in it in the long-ago to keep him company that night! If he stared at it long enough, would he not, perhaps, at length perceive far, far away, there in the most remote and distant and least-lighted corner of the room, the fair sad reflected face dimly advance of some Moldavian dame who had wept and kissed and loved and lost in the old days of the Hospodars?

“Les miroirs par les jours abrégés de Décembre
Songent—telles les eaux captives—dans les chambres,
Et leur melancolie a pour causes lointaines
Tant de visages doux fanés dans ces fontaines
Qui s’y voyaient naguère embellis de sourires.”

Then, drawing up a comfortable arm-chair before the blazing logs, he seated himself, and taking up *Le Rouge et le Noir*, which he happened to find lying on the table by his side, ere long had

read himself to sleep over the marvellous narrative of the vicissitudes of Julien Sorel, only awaking, indeed, when the

“fair-faced sun,
Killing the stars and dews and dreams and desolations
of the night,”

was plainly visible through the curtains, and the noises of the awakening household warned him that another day had begun. Then he arose and went to bed, fondly believing that by this little comedy he was deceiving the omniscient Adams, who, as a matter of fact, perched on a step-ladder in the adjoining apartment, had kept an unceasing watch over his master's slumbers.

That day, Rowan's last day on earth, passed without any incident worthy of notice. Jeratzesco announced at breakfast that he had engaged a band of *laoutari*—gipsy minstrels—to enliven his friends, but that, as he only expected them to arrive late that night, his guests would not have the opportunity of enjoying their wild and delightful music until the morrow.

“I shall lodge them in your wing of the house, where they'll be quiet,” explained Tony to Colonel Rowan, later on in the day, when they happened to be alone. “You know how beautiful some of these tziganes women are, and how jealously guarded by their men. I don't want a row here, and there's no knowing what mad folly

Eldourdza and his friends might be up to when drunk.”

And that the prudent Tony was quite justified in taking all precautionary measures to ensure peace and tranquillity during the sojourn of the gypsies beneath his roof, was amply proved that very night when they arrived late, for the Moldavian magnates, who, with Eldourdza at their head, would seem to have intentionally got drunk rather earlier than usual that evening, were only with the greatest difficulty restrained by their host from rushing out into the moonlit courtyard and embracing the women of the minstrel band, as they were seen and heard passing and chattering and singing on their way to their quarters. The arrival of these gypsies, and the prospect of the break which their performances would make in the monotony of the daily life at the château (which, by the way, all save the most enthusiastic sportsmen would have found intolerably tedious), greatly enlivened Hippy Rowan's spirits; and when he retired for the night—the last night but one of this absurd waiting for surprises, as he reminded himself with a smile—he opened his window and looked out across the quadrangle to the lights in the rooms occupied by the wandering musicians, wondering whether indeed this band contained any of those really beautiful women such as he remembered having remarked

among the Strelna gypsy musicians of Moscow—women unlike any other to be found in any class or country in the world, and whose peculiar charm is as indescribable as it is indisputable, possessing as it does a power partaking of the supernatural, springing as it were from a fountain of fascination infernal. What a splendid night! And nearly Christmas too, the very season for ghostly masquerading, and— But hark! a woman's voice singing.

Hippy leaned out and listened. The voice was low and very sweet, though the woman singing was evidently engaged in some other occupation which absorbed her attention, for there would be careless pauses in her song, the words of which, in a Roumanian dialect, ran somewhat as follows:—

“Love shot his arrow o'er the sea,
 And all the waters leaped with joy,
 Lifting their foam-wreathed arms in glee,
 To bid the sunlight hold the boy;
 But the sun said
 ‘My beams are shed
 To cheer with flowers the lonely dead.’

Here the singing ceased for a moment, but presently a man's voice took up the song, singing in the same careless fashion, stopping every now and then—

“Death spread his pinions o'er the sea,
 And all the waves with stormed-thrilled breath

In sobs besought the moon that she
Might break the tear-plumed wings of death.
But the moon cried
'My silver tide
Will only'—"

But here a merry burst of laughter interrupted the singer, and though for some time after Rowan could hear the voices of the gypsies laughing and talking, he could not distinguish what was being said, and there was no more singing.

"What a strange people!" murmured Rowan to himself, as he closed the window, "and what suitable neighbours to have on such a night as this, when at any moment now I may expect to see a cavalcade of ghosts come galloping into the room!"

Then the watchful Adams saw his master make his usual careful inspection of the room, seat himself by the fire, take up *Stendhal* again, and read himself to sleep, as on the previous night. Suddenly Rowan awoke, roused by a sound that stole into his ears very gradually and very gently, but which, when his drowsy faculties had understood its meaning, stirred them to instant activity—the sound of weeping. He sprang to his feet and looked around the room. He was alone; the apartment was brilliantly illuminated, thanks to two large lamps and several tapers in girandoles, and he

could plainly see into the farthest corner: nobody—no animated creature was visible. He listened: not a sound broke the stillness of the night. He must have been dreaming. But no—hark! there it was again, the sound of weeping, of someone in great and bitter distress; it came from the corridor, and not far from his chamber door. Should he go and see what it was? Could this be any part of the Moldavians' masquerading? Surely not! Hardly would they begin their attempt to frighten a man by such heart-rending expressions of anguish, which could evoke but pity and compassion. Again! Oh, what a wealth of woe! And a woman too; the long-drawn, gasping, tear-clogged suspiration was pitched in a key of peculiar pathos, which that treasury of divine tenderness, a woman's heart, alone can find to woo compassion in. Again—yes, certainly a woman: could it perchance be one of the *laoutari*? The corridor led to the part of the house where they were sleeping, and so far as he knew they were the only women in the house except the servants. Surely Eldourdza had nothing to do with this, and even if he had, what then? Had not this drunken Moldavian boor already occupied his mind quite long enough with speculations as to what he might, and what he might not, be about to do? Let him do as he pleased,

and what he liked, and go to the devil! There was a woman in terrible distress just outside his door, and he, Hippy Rowan, must go to her without delay—that was very clear. So, taking his revolver in his hand in case of need, Rowan advanced to his door, opened it wide, and looked out into the sombre corridor; Adams, greatly frightened, watching his master the while and, having heard nothing, being at a loss to understand the colonel's conduct. Even as he opened the door Rowan saw that he had guessed aright, and that it was a woman who was giving utterance to these most pitiful and heart-rending expressions of anguish. There she lay, not very near his door after all, weeping bitterly, her face buried in her hands—lay prone as if she had been praying on her knees for mercy, and in a very agony of supplication had fallen forward. Rowan saw at once that those white and shapely hands clasped in such dolour must belong to a young woman, and so his voice assumed a tone of very special tenderness and compassion, as he said in the Roumanian dialect in which he had heard the gypsies singing—

“What is it, lady? Can I help you?”

The mourner, who apparently had not remarked the opening of the door, at the sound of Hippy's voice ceased her lamenting, and after a moment's pause slowly raised her head, with-

drawing her hands from her face as she did so, and revealing to Rowan's astonished eyes the most faultlessly lovely countenance he had ever gazed upon in living woman. It was a youthful copy of the most perfect type of the Mater Dolorosa, and never, Rowan told himself, had he known, until he saw those tearful and uplifted eyes, the sweet and wondrous power that violets could lend to grief to stir compassion with; nor, till he noted the delicate oval of that face, all the poetic value and pathetic eloquence of form; nor, till he marked the quivering of those parted, perfect lips, with what resistless tenderness sorrow could light upon the very throne of kisses. That the woman was not a gypsy was very evident, for her skin was of the most fine and delicate fairness, and her hair, which fell in caressing curls over her forehead, of a soft and tender brown, and, moreover, her dress was entirely unlike that of a tzigane, both in colour and in form, being all black, and fashioned, so far as Rowan could see, as that of a member of some religious order, the beautiful face being, as it were, framed round about in a covering not unlike a cowl. Rowan had heard, he thought, of some sisterhood in the neighbourhood: perhaps this fair mourner belonged to such a community—at all events she was assuredly a very lovely woman, and it behoved him, both as

a man of heart and as a man of taste, to console her in her sorrow. But to attain this desired end, of course the first and most necessary step would be to make himself understood, and that, apparently, he had not so far succeeded in doing. The lustrous violet eyes looked at him, indeed, with startled surprise and fawn-like timidity, though there was assuredly nothing redoubtable in the kind aspect of Hippy's handsome face, and he had instinctively hidden the revolver in his pocket the moment he had seen the pathetic prostrate figure in the corridor ; but beyond this half-frightened expression there was nothing to be recognised but sorrow in that lovely countenance, not the slightest indication that his words had conveyed to the mourner's mind any idea of sympathy and compassion. Again he addressed her, this time in no dialect, but in the purest Roumanian, and in a still more tender and sympathising tone than before, but the look of timid wonder in the sweet Madonna face remained unchanged. Then, feeling that the situation was becoming rather ludicrous, he said, this time speaking in German and beckoning towards the open door of his apartment—

“Lady, let me beg of you to tell me what troubles you! Come into my room and rest and warm yourself. Believe me, there is nothing I would not gladly do to be of service to you.

You have only to command me ; I am an Englishman, a gentleman, and a soldier—so you may trust me. Let me help you, lady ; come, I beg of you.” Then, after a pause, and as the mourner neither spoke nor moved, Hippy bowed and, motioning her to follow him, walked slowly into his room, turning every now and then and repeating his gesture of invitation, she the while remaining upon her knees looking after him, indeed, but making no attempt to rise and follow.

Although Adams had at no time lost sight of his master, whose back, as he seemed to be engaged in conversation with some invisible person far down the corridor, had always been within the range of the faithful servant’s vision, still it was with a feeling of great relief that he now saw the colonel come back into the room unharmed, although the expression of tenderness and pity in his master’s face rather puzzled the man, as did also the colonel’s conduct in turning when he had reached the fireplace and looking anxiously back towards the door, which he had left open behind him as if expecting and indeed longing for the arrival of some visitor. And at length, after the lapse of a few minutes,—a delay which, though brief, the servant could plainly see his master bore impatiently,—the longed-for visitor came ; and slowly emerging from the

darkness of the corridor with faltering steps, until at length she came to stand framed in the doorway, against one side of which, as if to support herself, she lightly placed a small white hand, Adams saw the slender black-robed figure of the sweet girl-mourner appear, and for the first time in his life was astonished, nay, astounded rather, for the marvellous resemblance in depth of tenderness, in purity of sorrow-hallowed loveliness, between this nocturnal lady visitor to his master, and the most inspired efforts of genius to depict the countenance of the Virgin Mother of God, so struck and so amazed the travelled and cultured valet, that he could hardly perhaps have been more filled with wonder had he actually seen a Madonna from a canvas, say, of Raphael, step down and stand before him clothed in flesh.

Perhaps some such fantastic idea of an incarnation of one of Raphael's Holy Virgins occurred to Rowan as he bowed low and advanced to welcome his fair visitor, for this time he addressed her in Italian, thanking her for the great honour she was doing him, making all kinds of graceful and very Italian protestations of sympathy and respect, and concluding a very pretty speech by begging her not to stay there on the threshold, but to come in and seat herself by the fire, adding that if his presence were in any way

distasteful to her, he would at once withdraw and leave her in undisturbed possession of the room. But this attempt, clothed in the choicest Tuscan, to inspire confidence met with no greater measure of success than had attended its Roumanian and German predecessors. The sweetly-sorrowful lady stood on the threshold in the same timid attitude, staring at the colonel with no abatement in the tender melancholy of her face, but apparently in nowise understanding his words, and even indeed ignoring his gesture inviting her to enter and be seated. What was to be done? He could hardly, of course, take this lovely girl-Madonna in his arms and drag her into his room by force, and yet it seemed intolerably absurd, and indeed impossible, to leave her standing there in the doorway. Why had she come even to the threshold of his door, if she had not intended coming farther in the event of her seeing nothing to alarm her? Of course, and beyond all doubt, if he could only make her understand his sympathy and respect, and that she need have no fear of him, she would come in and perhaps tell him the cause of her distress and let him help her; and on the other hand, knowing so many languages and even dialects and patois as he did, it seemed almost impossible that he should not be able at length to hit upon some form of

speech by which he could convey to this most perfect incarnate type of spiritual purity and loveliness the expression of his devoted homage. So he started off on a wild polyglottic steeplechase, making protestations of respect and sympathy and offers of aid and friendship in every language and dialect he could remember, from his native English to the patois spoken by the Jews in White Russia. But all to no purpose; and at length he was constrained to pause and acknowledge that he was utterly defeated and quite at the end of his tether, for although in the course of his chatter his hands even had not been idle (for the horrible possibility of this beautiful woman being a deaf mute had occurred to him), nothing that his tongue or fingers could find to tell had been able to bring the faintest gleam of recognition or even of curiosity to that perfect face.

“You’re very beautiful,” said he at last, with a sigh, speaking in his native English, the inability of his fair auditor to understand him possessing at least the meagre and thankless advantage of allowing him to express his admiration in words no matter how impassioned, provided, of course, he took care his face should not betray the significance and ardour of his speech—“the most beautiful woman I think I ever saw, but you’re a beautiful riddle, and I don’t know how to read you.

What language can you speak, I wonder? Only the language of love, perhaps! Were I to kneel down there before you, or take you in my arms and kiss you, in what language would you repulse me, or—?” Here he paused, greatly surprised—were his eyes deceiving him, or was at length a change stealing over the Madonna face, and the timidity and sadness in it slowly giving place to an expression of some brighter sentiment? That she could not understand the language he was speaking he felt sure, for he had already addressed her in it and his words had evidently failed utterly to convey any meaning to her mind. But surely there was a difference now, and something he had said, or some gesture he had made, or some expression in his face, had been pleading to her, for the great shadow of melancholy was slowly passing from her face. But between the language, the English he had used before and that which he had just spoken, what difference was there? None, of course, save in the sense; then the words had been of respect and sympathy, now of love and tenderness. Could it be that by some marvellous intuition her woman’s instinct had at once divined the more tender words? or indeed was it not possible, nay, likely, that in speaking them he had involuntarily let their meaning be reflected in his eyes, and that she

had read it there? But then such tenderness and affection were not displeasing to her, and this mask of the Madonna, this ideal type of womanly purity, could be lighted by the joy of love? The thought set Rowan's blood coursing through his veins like fire, and made his heart beat as if he had been but twenty. He must see, and at once: he would speak to her again in words of affection, and let his eyes partly and by degrees interpret what he said, but carefully of course, and always guided by what he should see her eyes reply to his, lest he should offend her. And so he began telling this lovely woman in very low, quiet, and grave tones, but in words of great tenderness, how fair he found her, and as he spoke his eyes expressed the meaning of his words more and more clearly and ardently as he recognised with ever-growing delight that the Madonna face was being gradually illuminated and transfigured by joy, as word after word of ever-increasing passion, echoed in tender glances from his eyes, fell from his lips. And as he spoke he did not advance towards her, but only clasped his hands and stood still: far from her, looking at her in the doorway, while she, more and more visibly affected by his ever-growing emotion, first withdrew her hand from the side of the door where she had leant it, and pushed back the cowl from her face a little, still

further disclosing, by so doing, the wavy wealth of soft brown curls, and then, as the violet eyes became by degrees lighted with great joy and the sweet lips melted to a smile of ineffable rapture, clasped both hands together just beneath her cheek in an attitude of girlish and innocent delight. And thus she stood until the fervour of Rowan's words and voice and eyes rose to an ecstasy of passion, and then leaning forward her head, not indeed to hide the sweet blushes which were rising to her cheeks, but as a child eager to rush to a beloved embrace, and her eyes answering the ardour she read in those she gazed into, she half stretched forth her arms as if her longing to twine them in a caress were but restrained by maiden bashfulness. Rowan saw the gesture, stepped forward, opened wide his arms, and the girl-Madonna rushed to his embrace, nestling her blushing face upon his neck, as in a rapture of fondness he clasped her to his bosom. At the same moment a terrible cry rang through the room and through the house, waking the tziganes, who sprang from their beds in mad terror, and startling the stupid Moldavians, who, despairing of really frightening Rowan, had decided on merely making him look a fool, and were at that very moment creeping up the staircase, dressed in absurd costumes and armed with monster squirts and all kinds of

grotesque instruments—the cry of a strong man in an agony of terror ; and the horrified Adams saw his master hurl the woman from him with great violence, snatch his revolver from his pocket, discharge three chambers of it at her in quick succession, and then reel and fall forward on his face, the woman rising from the floor apparently unhurt, and gliding from the apartment by the still open door. When Adams reached his master's side he found him quite dead, and the body presenting two most remarkable peculiarities : first, a very strong odour of musk, and, secondly, on the neck three small wounds shaped like three X's joined together. The medical man, a German, who was immediately called in, ascribed the death of Colonel Rowan to aneurism of the heart, and declined to attach the least importance to the three small wounds or bites on the neck, the post-mortem examination proving that, so far as the cause of death was concerned, the physician was right in his conjecture.

As for the strange lady with the Madonna face, Adam was far too shrewd a man of the world to make known the extraordinary circumstance to everyone. He told Tony Jeratzesco, and inquiries were made, but no such person had been seen or heard of, and so the matter dropped, and it is only within the last few

months that Mr. Adams, now retired from his delicate and difficult profession of valet, and living in the neighbourhood of Newmarket, could be prevailed upon to give a detailed account of all the strange facts connected with the death of his master, show Hippy Rowan's diary, and complete his story by producing a photograph, which he himself had taken of the dead man's neck, on which is plainly visible the imprint of the Kiss of Judas.

THE STRANGE STORY OF A DIAMOND



A FEW years ago in Paris on a certain night in January, if anyone had penetrated into the salon of an apartment *au premier* in the Rue du Cirque, he, she, or they, might have found, lazily lying back and enjoying a cigar, one of those men who have an especial claim to be considered favourites of fortune. Sosthène de Valréas, from the moment he made his *début* in French society, had been a social success, and this was due more to the charming personal qualities of the man, and especially perhaps to his great amiability and good nature, than to any other cause. His family was old and noble, but there were many older and many more noble. His fortune, without being immense, was quite sufficient to meet all his wants as a man of fashion and pleasure, but it was not so uncomfortably large as to engender cares, or to render him apprehensive of being married for his money. He

was not remarkable either for his beauty or his wit, having the typical face and figure of a French *homme de race*, and possessing perhaps no more liberal allowance of brain power than is vouchsafed to the average member of the Jockey, Union, and Petit Clubs. Those who did not know him well, therefore, would never have anticipated that within a year of his *début* in the salons of Madame la Duchesse d'Avray, in the Rue François I., he would become the leader of "High Life" and the most sought-after man in the most exclusive coterie of the French capital. Cette chère duchesse had brought out many young men in her day, and when first she brought out Sosthène, her day was becoming twilight; but never before, as she herself averred, had her tuition and chaperonage met with so brilliantly successful a result. The Prince de K. began well, indeed, and for two years one might almost have expected anything of him, but then at length, alas! notwithstanding all the warnings of Madame la Duchesse, he allowed himself to be mixed up too much with "le turf," became hampered with sporting debts, took to wearing queer-looking clothes—"très Newmarkette" indeed, as the prince himself and his friends described them, but which evidently did not come from the vicinity of Bond Street,—and at length was forced to put

himself into the hands of the Princess de B. to marry him to money. This was a sad collapse, and the future of the prince was hardly what we, with our insular prejudices, would consider reassuring ; for, as the cynical duchesse, with more truth than delicacy, remarked to him the evening before the signing of the marriage contract, he could not expect people to refrain from making love to his wife, since he himself had exercised no self-restraint in this particular as regards the wives of others. There was no help for it, however, for a conspiracy among the usurers of Paris had been formed against him, and money must be forthcoming or the frontier gained in time.

The next great flash in the pan of the duchesse's society gun was the young Marquis de Q. He was immensely rich, and so could indulge in "le turf" to almost any extent he pleased, without there being any reason to fear social ruin for him on that account, but nevertheless his success in society was of short duration. He was too compromising. In vain did the duchesse tell him that he must always find out beforehand if a woman is open to intrigue before beginning to lay siege to her heart *en règle*. Before he had been a year *dans le monde*, and just as the Empress was beginning to treat him with marked condescension at her *petits bals*, he made a fool of himself with a lady who

prided herself upon her most rococo chastity, and was forced to fight a duel with her husband, thus compromising a woman who detested him. He was sent, by the influence of the duchesse, after this sad contretemps, to Constantinople in a quasi-diplomatic position, and it was hoped he would return a wiser man.

The late Baron James de Rothschild told Lord Dalling not to mind about the first mistake he made, but that it was "number two" that counted ; and so it was with the unlucky marquis. On his way home, and during his stay in Vienna, he saw, tried to conquer (without writing to the duchesse to make inquiries, as he had promised to do), failed, was forced to fight another duel, and this time was crippled for life. After this there could be no more hope. It was bad enough, as Madame de C. pathetically remarked, to be compromised by one's lover, but if husbands were to be forced to fight every crétin who, without any encouragement, might think fit to fall in love with their wives, unless the thing were put a stop to, there would soon be no husbands left to deceive. The marquis, therefore, was banished, that is to say, was induced to accept a diplomatic post in Washington, in hopes that the charms of Yankee women and Yankee dollars—for a man is of course never so rich as not to want more—would for ever put him *en*

retraite. Now, Sosthène de Valréas had never caused the duchesse a moment's uneasiness. His style was perfect, with just enough of the *sportsman* about him to be palatable; and above all, not particularly anything to so extreme a degree as to make him remarkable, except perhaps as a dancer. The duchesse well knew the deceptive fragility of the social success begotten, not only of eccentricity, but of perfection in many things. The men who hold empire over society the longest are men who do many things quite well, but who do not excel in more than one; for not only does overwhelming excellence excite jealousy and create enemies, but it bores and fatigues. This was thoroughly well understood by the duchesse, and she took care to give the benefit of her philosophy to Sosthène, who, moreover, took advantage of it. His dancing was certainly perfection. In the course of his second year in society he led a cotillon at a *petit bal* at the Tuileries, by the particular request of the habitual leader; and three nights before the Grand Prix of that year, said the most cutting, the most impertinent, the most witty, and the most graceful thing of the season to one of the titled pupils of Thérésa. Many men can dance well, but here was a mere boy (Sosthène at that time was only twenty-one) gracefully running away, after the fashion of Joseph, from the

bewitching blandishments of one of the most fashionable women of her day, leaving a cutting epigram in lieu of cloak behind him. From that hour his social success was an accomplished fact. It was a great thing to be noticed by the "grande dame" in question, a greater thing to have been noticed affectionately, still a greater thing to have declined these overtures, and the greatest thing of all, to have declined them with a wit that would have delighted the loungers in the *Œil de Bœuf*. A duel he had fought the previous year proved that his heart was sensitive, but his cutting witticism showed he had determined it should not become a fashionable hotel, and these two facts combined caused the women of Paris to make him the god of their idolatry.

Now that we introduce him to the reader, he has been fifteen years at the head of social matters in the French capital, and is still the most fashionable man in Paris. A word from him opens the door of "the Jockey," a whisper from his lips would close upon anyone all the salons of the Faubourg; and above all, a peculiar coat, horse, carriage, dog, or expression he may affect, will make all Paris follow suit. His latest whim is a passion for diamond rings, not to wear, but simply to collect, and Boucheron and Mellerio have, in consequence, been doubling

their yearly profits. It was always one of the many peculiar affectations of Sosthène de Valréas never to change his whims until everyone had had ample time to copy them ; never suddenly to abandon a freak, leaving one half Paris regretful and the other disappointed. When asked once by Prince Richard Metternich why he allowed his tastes to become known for so long as to enable everyone to copy him, he superciliously replied :

“My whims, prince, are the result of long meditation, and I have so little time to think, indeed my intellect is so limited, that I cannot afford to change my necktie. Moreover, I am anxious that my ideas should have a lasting influence—should permeate all classes, so that years hence, when I am married *en bon bourgeois*, a man may look at an old glove and think, ‘I bought that when I was at school at Stanislas. Ah ! it was the year de Valréas made all Paris wear *sang de bœuf*!’”

As a matter of fact, it is more than probable that sheer good nature was the real cause of his constancy. If he had changed his whims as he changed his shirt, he knew all Paris would follow him, even if the following him entailed ruin ; he knew this and desisted.

Let us return to him as we found him at the opening of this story. It is eleven o'clock in the

evening and he has refused all invitations but one, has dined quietly at his club, and been at home since nine. The cause of this unwonted solitude and seclusion is simple enough—he made an arrangement a fortnight back with the managers of Mellerio's to be quite alone on this especial evening, that the jeweller might submit to him the finest diamond rings he could procure. The tradesman has just left him, and the young marquis is smoking a meditative cigar previous to going to a ball. It is a terrible nuisance this ball! He would much rather return to the "Jockey," have a little *écarté*, and get to bed early, but well does he know that the giver of the entertainment—a vulgar and enormously rich Mexican woman—has set her heart upon his presence there, has invited her friends specially to show him to them, and he is too good-natured to refuse so trifling a favour, even at the expense of his own personal convenience. Half thinking of the nuisance of the ball, and half of the beauty of the diamonds he has just seen, he lies smoking his cigar. As well as we can see him in the shaded light of the room, he appears to be moderately tall, rather inclined to be stout, with brown curly hair, blue eyes, regular features, and wearing his beard somewhat after the fashion of Henri IV. His thoughts run somewhat in this way:

“What a bore this American woman is! I shall be shown off like a prize pig, and meet all kinds of queer *déclassés*. Why did I allow myself to be persuaded by Carolus d’Yquem, who swore the woman would never speak to him again unless he introduced me to her, and unless I promised to come to her wretched ball? If they expect me to dance the cotillon, or even to wait for it, they are deucedly mistaken. There is no other man in Paris who would be so good-natured as to go, but then I always knew I was the best hearted, as surely I am the best dressed, man in Paris. What a beautiful Golconda stone! By the way, he ought to let me have it cheaper, for, although of course I shan’t pay him for years, he knows I am worth millions to him in other ways. But when was a tradesman found with common sense? They don’t send in their bills when you have money, but so surely as you are hard-up, in come the accounts. They are very like women, charming when you are out of sorts, gloomy and cold when you are gay. I can’t complain of *le beau sexe* however, God knows! I wish they would be a little more gloomy and cold! Cold? Think how cold it must be out to-night! I shall catch a *fluxion de poitrine* going to that wretched negress’s! They say she’s good fun—so intensely vulgar; but I don’t see any fun in that sort of thing myself. There

will be nobody I have ever seen before, or shall ever see again"—

His reflections were interrupted by the clock striking the half-hour. He rose angrily and struck a timbre, which was immediately answered by the most faithful and discreet of valets.

"Is the carriage below?" asked Sosthène, putting on his hat.

"*La voiture de M. de Marquis l'attend,*" murmured Hippolyte, as he helped his master into a greatcoat, which gave him the appearance of a bear when once wrapped in its ponderous Russian sable folds.

"Should anyone call for me, say I have been called away on a mission of charity—to see somebody who is in great distress."

He said this gravely, nor did Hippolyte suspect the sarcasm underlying his words, for he knew the apartment of his master was the refuge for fashionable *décavés* who found it impossible at times to pay by two o'clock next day large sums lost the previous evening at the Cercle, and who were thus forced to rely (and, so as far De Valréas was concerned, never in vain) upon the generosity of their friends. With a great sigh of regret at being forced to leave his warm apartment on so disagreeable an errand, he hurried downstairs, into his well-warmed brougham, and off to the ball.

The Mexican woman, to whose house he was going, was a Madame de Manzanilla, a woman about forty, considered by many men to be handsome, being what Frenchmen call *une belle femme*, that is, fat and profuse; and her fortune was stated to be something enormous. Her husband was ever absent from Paris attending, as was supposed, to his affairs in Vera Cruz, and leaving his wife to spend her money (for it was hers, and not his) in the French capital, and make unsuccessful attempts to get into society there. People, however, would have nothing to do with her; that is to say, people whose "doing" with anyone was of real importance. Of course, the American colony opened its arms to her, and the be-diamonded darlings of the Rocky Mountains were ever to be found in great force in her salons, drawling out, in a pretty, plaintive, little nasal way, queer French to such men as Madame de Manzanilla could entrap. These men came from anywhere and everywhere. Spars from the wreck of the Court of the Tuileries, mysterious magnates of the Bourse, queer men from Austria and Russia, still queerer men from New York, and an occasional Englishman, who, if he happened to have no social status in his own country, could assume one here with impunity, or, if he happened to be even remotely connected with a man bearing a title, might taste

for once the intoxicating delight of being a Triton among minnows.

Generally speaking, however, at every ball given by the lady in question one could always count upon finding one individual of real *bonâ fide* social position. One man was always asked, and one always came, whose name and position were beyond criticism or cavil; and although, if married, he always came without his wife, his presence leavened the whole lump, and gave a cachet of good society to the entertainment, which the presence of the sons and daughters of Yankee tradesmen and Havanese merchants was powerless to bestow. Sometimes it was a sleepy, stupid Spanish prince of royal blood, or bland and self-astonished English peer, or lazy and good-natured Turkish diplomatist; but to-night the excitement was intense, for was not the great, the graceful and refined, the witty, the sought-after Marquis de Valréas coming, and was this not the consummation of the Mexican woman's highest ambition? A week ago she would not have believed the thing possible. She had been accustomed to seeing the marquis's name in the papers, announcing his presence at various gatherings of the "gratin" of the noble Faubourg, and had known for some time his pleasant, high-bred face by sight, from seeing him at the bois and the opera: but that he could be induced to come

to one of her January *jeudis* was a felicity she had never contemplated. It had been brought about (or rather was to be brought about, for she knew well she could not be absolutely certain of the blessing until she actually saw the marquis in her salon) by the ubiquitous Carolus d'Yquem, than whom no man was more useful in his day. There was nothing it would appear he could not do, and to oblige a friend he would do most things. Are you wishing to go to the Conservatoire, and has everyone told you it is quite impossible? D'Yquem happens to know that the Princess de M. does not want her box on that particular Sunday, and in two hours it is in your possession. Are you desirous that the Baron H. should look into, weigh, and examine, and, if possible, adopt your latest plan for the amelioration or destruction of something, and has everyone told you it was easier to find the Emperor alone in the old days of the Second Empire than this great financier and speculator now in this time of the Third Republic? D'Yquem arranges matters so that in a week you have the baron all to yourself at a charming little dinner party at the Pavillon Henri IV. Are you anxious to see a most remarkable missal, that is worth more than twice its weight in gold, and that is so jealously guarded by its owner, Madame la Baronne A. de R., that not even the most dis-

tinguished cognoscenti are allowed to see it? The day after to-morrow d'Yquem will procure you the inestimable privilege, only stipulating that you must not breathe upon the marvel. He was a treasure, was Carolus d'Yquem! and when at length, at a quarter to twelve, the surly Alsatian footman announced "Monsieur le Marquis de Valréas," the enraptured creole felt that he was indeed a god of beneficence. There was a pause, a momentary stillness fell on the room, and if Waldteufel—who knew Sosthène well, and had had many private and confidential interviews with him relative to cotillons—had not, in a stubborn way, continued to hammer out, with an intoxicating contretemps, the latest of his charming waltzes, the silence would have been unbroken. The American women all drew themselves up, tried to look at their ease, and murmured "Oh my!" as Sosthène bowed with easy grace to Madame de Manzanilla, who was giddy with great and sudden joy. After a few careless compliments, poor Sosthène endeavoured to pass on, penetrate farther into the crowded rooms, in the despairing hope of finding, perhaps, someone he knew, at least by sight, and his hostess was too clever not to perceive that it would be dangerous not to let him have his own way for a few minutes. A multitude of pretty faces, but not one of them familiar to him who

knew "all Paris." He had nearly given up in despair, and was turning over in his mind how much longer it was absolutely necessary for him to stay, when a hand was placed on his shoulder, and turning he perceived the pale, grave face of the Vicomte d'Yquem smiling pityingly upon him.

"*Tiens, c'est toi!* I am delighted to see you, for I was beginning to fear I should know no one."

"I am sure *notre chère hôtesse* would be only too delighted to introduce you to everyone," replied Carolus, smiling.

"*Dieu m'en preserve!* I don't care to know anyone now I have found you, especially as I must leave in ten minutes, for I promised to be at the Cercle at half-past twelve, and am dead tired as it is."

"*Pauvre enfant!* It was very good of you to come. I"—

But just at this juncture a fine, tall woman, gorgeously dressed and covered with diamonds, came up to Sosthène, and said with a strong nasal twang, but otherwise with capital accent—

"The Marquis de Valréas, I believe?"

Sosthène was so taken aback that he stared at the woman in amazement and then bowed.

"I am delighted at seeing you look so well. I am Mrs. Colonel Jabez P. Possum. I knew

the Empress very well indeed. The Marquis of Brentford of England is here. Shall I introduce you?"

All this in a breath, and coming from a woman he had never seen before in his life, almost stunned the young Frenchman, and he might have caused a scandal by falling insensible had not Carolus come to the rescue.

"You forget all your old friends, Madame Possum; I have something very particular to ask you in a minute." Then lowering his voice so that no one but Mrs. Colonel P. could hear, he continued, "I am trying to get de Valréas to come to your ball on Wednesday. If you will only leave us alone for a minute I can settle the matter, and you shall have him all to yourself for the rest of the evening."

Before the tenacious American woman could reply, taking advantage of the great crowd that had gathered around Sosthène, and was staring at him sideways while pretending to be otherwise engaged, Carolus took his friend's arm and dragged him away.

"*Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!*" groaned Sosthène; "why did I ever come here?"

"Bah! that is nothing—Madame Possum is a most charming woman," laughed the Vicomte; "she knew your propensities and wanted to *flirter un brin*. She has the most wonderful

neck and arms, and her soirées are really very amusing—you can do and say what you like there. Shall I bring you to her next Wednesday?”

Sosthène was turning around, almost angrily, to reply, when his eye fell upon a short man standing near them, who had just taken off the glove of his right hand and was caressing his long grey moustaches.

“*Ciel!*” he exclaimed, “did you ever see such a wonderful diamond in your life?”

Carolus followed the direction of his friend’s eyes, and saw upon the little finger of the man we have mentioned a stone as big as the muzzle of a saloon pistol, and sparkling like a sea of crystal.

“*Diable!*” he exclaimed, “it is marvellous!”

“Marvellous!” echoed Sosthène, with his eyes fixed upon the gem as if enchanted.

“I never saw him wear that ring before,” mused the Vicomte.

“You know him, then? Who is he?”

“He calls himself an Austrian, and a count, but I think he is a Jew. *La belle Crèole* has him here very often.”

“It is strange I have never met him at the Embassy if he is a gentleman,” said Sosthène.

“Oh, he has a long story about having quarrelled with them there, but I myself be-

lieve the fellow is an adventurer. He is not liked even here."

Sosthène said nothing, but kept his eyes fixed upon the diamond. Suddenly he exclaimed, after a pause. "Oh, *mon Dieu!* did you see that ray of green it shot out then? It is really miraculous! What would I not give if he would only sell it to me!"

"Well, I will introduce you and you can ask him if you like. You need stand on no ceremony with the fellow, for I daresay he's a Dutch diamond merchant, only you must be careful not to be cheated, for I feel convinced the man is a rogue."

"*Très bien, très bien,*" rejoined Sosthène, in a state of feverish excitement, "introduce me."

In a minute the thing was done.

"M. le Comte," said d'Yquem, smiling, "allow me to present to you my friend the Marquis Sosthène de Valréas, who for the last ten minutes has been admiring your diamond ring."

The little man bowed gravely.

"M. le Marquis is fond of diamonds?"

"Yes, passionately," replied Sosthène; "and I confess I never saw a finer one than yours."

"Do you consider yourself a connoisseur?" asked the mysterious owner of the treasure.

"I have been studying them for the last six months, aided by Mellerio and Boucheron, and I think I know something about them."

"In that case," said the other, with a queer smile, and drawing the ring from his finger, "perhaps you would like to examine this, and perhaps you might guess its approximate value."

Sosthène was amazed at such a strange and remarkable proceeding, but deciding within himself that doubtless Carolus was right, and that the man was a Jew diamond broker disposing of his wares, bowed, took the ring and examined it closely. It was even more magnificent than he had first supposed. Large, deep, beautifully cut, with an immense table, pure white, without being in any degree milky, and brilliant as the sun. The little man watched him keenly as Sosthène examined the ring.

"I should say," said the marquis, after a pause, still holding the ring in his hand, "at a rough guess, it was worth thirty-five or forty thousand francs, but of course I cannot fix upon its exact value. It is evidently a Golconda stone."

The little man smiled. "You are right in one way, M. le Marquis," he said; "it is true the ring is worth at least forty thousand francs to me—in fact, I would not sell it under fifty; but the real market value of the stone is not probably so many sous."

Sosthène looked at him with surprise. The little man paused for a minute as if enjoying the situation, and then said gravely—

"The stone is false!"

"False!" cried Sosthène and Carolus d'Yquem, who had been listening eagerly to all that was said. "False! Impossible!"

The count said nothing, but stood looking at them with an amused smile.

"Pardon, M. le Comte, said Sosthène, "but you must be deceived. I have, as I told you, made diamonds my study lately, and can assure you this stone is real. You have doubtless been told it was false by someone who desired to get it from you at a price much below its real value."

"I repeat," replied the little man, smiling, "that the stone is false, but it does not surprise me that you cannot believe it, for, far from it being the fact that anyone has told me so in order to buy it below its value, I can get nobody to believe me when I tell them that it is false, and have frequently been offered large sums for it."

Sosthène examined the stone again, and after a minute—"It is extraordinary!" he exclaimed. "I could have staked my life and honour that it was real. I can hardly believe my senses. I am certain Mellerio would be of the same opinion."

"Very likely," replied the little man drily. "I suppose even jewellers may be deceived.

As a matter of fact, however, the stone is false."

"How can you be quite certain of that?"

"*Parbleu!* I saw it made!"

"Saw it made!" exclaimed Sosthène.

The count bowed. "Then there can be no doubt about it, Sosthène," said Carolus d'Yquem, who was getting, he knew not why, a little frightened.

De Valréas made no reply, but examined the ring minutely for the third time, and then, after a pause, said in a hesitating tone—

"I hope you will not consider me too inquisitive, M. le Comte, but may I ask how it is that, knowing it to be false as you do, you value it at fifty thousand francs?"

The count became grave immediately. "Pardon me, M. le Valréas," he said coldly, "but we are scarcely on such terms of intimacy as to warrant your becoming my father confessor." Then perceiving the pain his well-merited rebuke inflicted on the sensitive and high-bred marquis, he added, "But I am *bon enfant*, and do not mind admitting to you that I prize that ring because of a story attached to it; and then, after all, although it is certainly false, as it deceives everyone,—even," and he bowed, "such a connoisseur as M. le Marquis himself,—it has as much value, very nearly, as if it were indeed real."

There was no more to be said. The man insisted upon it that it was false, and it was hardly an assertion a man—no matter how waggishly inclined—would make to an entire stranger, whether he was willing to sell it or not.

“I never saw you wear the ring before,” said Carolus suspiciously.

“I do not often wear it,” replied the count carelessly. “It attracts such general attention, and always leads to such absurd mistakes and explanations.” Then, seeing Sosthène still lovingly examining the ring, he added with a laugh, “I see you cannot bring yourself to believe my word, M. de Valréas, and you must not think your doubts offend me in the least. I never could get anyone to believe the stone was false; that is,” he added after a pause, “anyone but a very clever jeweller.”

Sosthène looked up quickly. “A jeweller has told you, then, it is false?” he asked.

“Yes, two jewellers have given me that astounding piece of information, which I confess surprised me but little, as I saw it made myself.”

Sosthène gave him back the ring with a sigh.

“I wish it were real,” he said naively. “I would have been willing to give you almost any sum for it.”

The count bowed, smiled, and replaced the

coveted gem on his finger. Just at that moment Carolus d'Yquem, perceiving Mrs. Colonel Jabez P. Possum bearing down upon them, dragging by the arm the unwilling English peer, who walked as in a dream, he pushed de Valréas farther on into the crowd, and hustled him quickly into the next room, which he hurried through likewise. When they had reached a third, which appeared to be given up to a few old men playing "Boston" and "Picquet," and which was tolerably safe from the eager arm of Mrs. Colonel Jabez P., he said laughingly, looking at Sosthène's angry countenance—

"You must not be offended, *mon cher*, but we were only just in time. One minute more and l'Americaine and her friend the Marquis of Brentford would have been upon you."

"I shall go home now," said Sosthène sullenly. "I came here to please you, and the place is an *enfer*. I really cannot stand it any longer, and you cannot expect me to."

"You must do as you please," rejoined Carolus, good humouredly. "I only promised to bring you, not to keep you, here. But cannot you manage one waltz? There is a charming Cuban girl here with such eyes!"

"Bah!" sneered the marquis in disgust. "I detest *Havanaises*—a mongrel race that always smells of cigarettes and garlic; as for fine eyes,

every woman nowadays has fine eyes, but none so fine or expressive as those of a horse. Besides, I must really go now; that diamond has quite upset me." With a warm pressure of the hand and "*à demain au cercle!*" the friends parted, and Sosthène, thankful to get away and careless about seeing his hostess again, made his way to the cloak-room. There, to his great surprise, he found the mysterious owner of the diamond ring, apparently waiting for his greatcoat. He bowed gravely to Sosthène, and, having obtained what he was in quest of, was going away when de Valréas stopped him. He had caught another glimpse of the diamond ring, and the effect was overpowering.

"I cannot express to you, M. le Comte," he said, "how that diamond interests me. May I hope that if you have nothing better to do and are not tired, you will allow me to offer you a cigar and a bottle of hock *chez moi?*"

The count bowed. "You are very kind," he said simply. "I am not tired and have nothing to do, for as I am only in Paris for a short time, I belong to no club. I shall be very happy to go with you."

In a minute or two Sosthène succeeded in obtaining his property, and the count's coachman having been ordered to drive on and wait for his master at the marquis's, they both got into

Sosthène's *coupé* and drove to the Rue du Cirque. The count said nothing during the drive, and Sosthène was in no mood for conversation just then, so the time appeared interminably long.

"At last!" cried Sosthène, as the carriage drove into his *porte cochère*. "My night horses go like snails. I hope I shall be able to cure you of the chill you must have caught. Hippolyte!" he cried, as that worthy appeared at the sound of his master's latch-key. "More logs and some bottles of Steinberger."

In a few minutes they were seated by a blazing fire, enjoying excellent cigars and baptizing their new friendship with the breast milk of the Rhine. For some time the conversation ran on indifferent subjects, and Sosthène learnt that his friend had a great taste for science, especially chemistry, was a widower, and possessed a château not far from Pesth. The marquis could not, however, take his eyes off the diamond ring, which flashed and sparkled and appeared every moment to gain in brilliancy, and the count, doubtless remarking this, said abruptly after a short pause, and lighting another cigar, "I see, *mon cher marquis*, that you are bewitched with this wretched piece of glass. I hardly know how I can cure you of your infatuation. Take it and examine it again. If you really

know much about diamonds, you must discover that it is false on closer examination." He drew the ring off his finger and gave it to the marquis, who seized it eagerly, and felt a thrill of pleasure as he touched the splendid glittering lie once more. The more he looked at it the more certain he felt that the count had been deceived and that the stone was real, and so, after a pause, he said abruptly, looking up, "Suppose I were willing to buy it, false as it is, would you be willing to part with it?"

The count appeared first astonished and then perplexed. "I might perhaps," he said slowly, and after a short pause, "be willing to part with the ring; for although I cherish it, it brings back painful memories. But it is absurd to talk of such a sale, for I could not part with it for a small sum, for it is of great value as a curiosity and work of art, quite apart from its value to me as a souvenir."

"If I were to offer you the price you think fair for it, would you let me have it?" urged Sosthène, who had become greatly excited.

"How can you expect me to allow you to pay me a large sum of money simply to gratify your whim, and to purchase of me a thing which I really know to be of no great value to anyone but myself? No; I could not think of such a thing. You might be willing to pay me fifty

thousand francs (and I would not take less), but how could I, as an honest man, sell you a mere piece of paste at such a price? So let us, I beg of you, say no more about it."

"I will give you fifty thousand francs for it," cried Sosthène, heedless of the count's remark about closing the discussion.

The count rose, evidently greatly agitated, and walked up and down the room a few minutes before replying. Then he came up to the marquis and said, "Listen to me. Keep the ring till to-morrow. I have no hesitation in leaving it in your care. To-morrow see Mellerio, Boucheron, Samper—whom you will; they will tell you the truth about the stone, and I hope their verdict will cure you of your infatuation. Nay," he added, as Sosthène made an unwilling gesture, "I beg you, as a favour, keep it until to-morrow. I will leave you my card and you can let me hear from you the day after to-morrow. It is late; I must leave you now."

In vain did Sosthène feebly expostulate; the count with kind firmness insisted on having his own way in the matter, and the result was that the ring was left with de Valréas. When the count had finally taken his departure, Sosthène, before going to bed, wrote three notes—one to the wife of the Austrian ambassador, asking if anything was known about his mysterious friend,

one to Boucheron, and one to Mellerio, requesting each of them to send to his house on the following day the most expert judges of diamonds they could find. The following morning Sosthène was up betimes, and in a feverish state of excitement to know the real value of the jewel which had so enchanted him. The wise men did not keep him long waiting, and all unanimously, after carefully examining the stone one after the other, pronounced it to be a real Golconda diamond, one of the finest seen in Paris for years outside the Crown jewels, and of the value of seventy thousand francs at the very least. Sosthène was wild with delight, and, jumping into his dog-cart, rattled off to the address in the Rue Caumartin given him by the count. He was at home, and as Sosthène entered the salon he came forward cordially to meet him.

“*Eh bien!*” he cried, with a slightly satirical laugh, “you have found out it is worthless, and so have been honest enough to bring it back to me.”

In a hurried and excited way Sosthène told him the result of the examination. The count's face fell.

“They have deceived you or been deceived themselves, as I have known them to be deceived about this before,” he said gravely. “I tell you I saw the thing made—it is mere paste.”

"Paste or not I will give you seventy thousand francs for it," cried Sosthène.

The count paused and for a moment appeared immersed in painful reflection, then he said, "See, marquis, I will do this. Give me back my ring, for I am certain the sight of it is bewitching you and upsetting your mental equilibrium. Take two days to reflect, and if after that you still wish to purchase this worthless imitation, you shall have it for sixty thousand francs."

"I cannot give you less than seventy thousand francs for it," cried Sosthène, delighted, and putting the jewel into the count's hand. "They all agreed it is worth at least seventy."

"Seventy be it then," replied the count; "but I must make one stipulation as a protection to my own honour.

"I will agree to any stipulation."

"I must insist, then," continued the count, "that in case, after two days, you still wish to buy this ring, you will assemble six of your friends and in their presence sign two statements, which I shall bring with me, and which, moreover, must be attested by the signatures of your friends."

"I promise you!" cried the enraptured marquis, and left him to tell the great news to his boon companions at the "Jockey." That

evening, while dressing for dinner, a note from the Austrian embassy was put into his hand, informing him that no such person as Count Broborg existed, and that the man bearing the title was an adventurer.

"*Tant pis!*" said Sosthène philosophically; "*J'en suis quitte* for a couple of bottles of hock and an amusing adventure. I can easily drop the man once the purchase is made. He has been honest enough with me, God knows!"

The next two days passed very slowly, and on the third Sosthène wrote a short word to the count, informing him that he was still bent upon having the diamond ring, and begging him to do him the honour to call upon him at five o'clock on the following afternoon, when the six witnesses would be in attendance. Immediately afterwards he wrote to the six most leading men in Paris (after himself), begging them to come and witness his triumph. At five punctually they were all assembled, and in a quarter of an hour the count arrived, bringing with him the two following statements written out by a solicitor's clerk.

First, "I, Adam, Count Broborg, do hereby sell, for the sum of seventy thousand francs, a piece of paste cut to imitate a diamond, to Sosthène, Marquis de Valréas. And I hereby declare, in the presence of six witnesses, and

before a penny has passed hands or anyone is bound in any way, that the object I sell him has never been represented by me to be a real diamond, but been openly declared by me to be a false one, and that I am only induced to part with it at the earnest request of M. de Valréas, who promises to pay me seventy thousand francs, knowing that what he purchases is an imitation stone of no real value."

The second, "I, Sosthène, Marquis de Valréas, do hereby, in the presence of six witnesses, affirm that I gladly and willingly pay to Adam, Count Broborg, the sum of seventy thousand francs for a piece of paste; and I hereby solemnly declare that the said Count Broborg has always told me the object I purchase is not a real diamond, but a false one, and that he has done everything in his power to dissuade me from purchasing what he always declared to me to be of no real value."

When Sosthène had read through the second statement he paused before signing it.

"I can hardly," he demurred, "acknowledge that I buy the stone knowing it to be paste, for, as a matter of fact, I know it to be a real diamond.

"M. le Marquis," said the count coldly, "as I have frequently told you before, the stone is not a diamond, and if you wish to become the owner

of this worthless imitation you must sign these papers, for I cannot allow my honour in this matter to be unprotected."

Sosthène saw that there was no way left but to sign the papers, and his friends, though rather unwillingly, attested by their signatures that they had been witnesses to this most strange transaction. The money was then paid and the ring formally made over to de Valréas, who could hardly believe in his good fortune, so delighted was he. The following morning at ten o'clock precisely he was at Mellerio's by appointment, to consult about a new setting for his treasure.

"I have brought it with me, Alphonse," said the marquis, "and I am certain I have made a most wonderful bargain. If, however, you really think it worth more than seventy thousand francs you must tell me so, for I cannot allow the count to be a loser through his stupid mistake and ignorance."

"If you will allow me to examine it again," replied the jeweller, "I will frankly and finally tell you its exact market value."

The marquis drew it from his waistcoat pocket and gave it him. Hardly had the jeweller's eyes lighted on it than he exclaimed, in great agitation, "M. le Marquis, this is not the same stone! This is paste! You have been cheated!"

“My God!” cried Sosthène, seizing the ring from the trembling hand of the other. “Impossible!” He strode to the window and examined it carefully. At the first glance one not well versed in such matters might have fancied the stone was the same as the one the count had worn the night of Madame de Manzanilla’s ball. It was the same size, cut in exactly the same way, and in the same queer old-fashioned setting. It was the same in every particular save one, and that a most important one: whereas the ring worn by the count was, so far as the keen intelligence of experts could determine, a real diamond of extraordinary beauty and great value, the falseness of this it needed but a casual glance from an experienced eye to detect. As Sosthène stood gazing in a bewildered and half-dazed way at his strange bargain, he suddenly remembered the letter from the Austrian embassy; and then, “*Mille diables!*” the two statements he had signed.

“*Miséricorde!* of course this is false! This is not the same stone.”

“No, M. le Marquis,” replied the jeweller, in a trembling voice, “it is certainly not the same stone. That was worth at least seventy thousand francs, whereas this—this”—

“Well?”

"As it is a good imitation, and mounted in gold, it may be worth three hundred."

"I must see this scoundrel at once," cried the marquis, "if he is in Paris; he has most probably run away, but he shall suffer for this if I have to ruin myself in prosecuting him!" Then hastily putting the ring in his pocket, he ran out of the room, jumped into his carriage, and drove like lightning to the Rue Caumartin. If he expected the count had run away he was greatly mistaken; he was at home, and as Sosthène entered the room, rose from his chair as if delighted to see him.

"This is an unlooked-for pleasure, *mon cher marquis!*" he exclaimed, with a cordial smile, advancing with outstretched hand.

Sosthène folded his arms and looked at him sternly—full in the face.

"Monsieur," he said gravely, "you have made some mistake. The diamond you sold me yesterday is not the same you left with me a week ago."

"M. le Marquis, I fail to understand your meaning. I never possessed but one diamond ring, and that is in your possession."

"This stone is false and worthless!" cried Sosthène, overcome with anger, and pulling it from his pocket.

"*Parbleu!* I told you so."

“*Fripou!*” exclaimed the other, “I cannot fight you, but I will horsewhip you from the Café Anglais to the Madeleine and send you to the hulks.”

“Pardon,” said the little man quietly, “as for horsewhipping me, I hardly think you will do that, and as for your remark about sending me to the hulks, it is my intention to bring an action against you forthwith for libel and defamation of character.”

“Defamation of character!” echoed the marquis. “*Misérable!* It is lucky for you I left my cane below. Do you think we have no laws in this country to punish such canaille as you?”

“You shall be better acquainted with the laws of your country before a week is over than you are at present perhaps, M. de Valréas.”

“Can you deny that you have cheated and robbed me? My jeweller is witness that the stone is not the same.”

“And on my side,” retorted the count, with a sneer, “I can call six witnesses, chosen from among your most cherished friends, to prove that I sold you what I openly confessed to be paste.”

Sosthène was literally dumbfounded by the cool villainy of the man. The count rang the bell.

“I must request M. le Marquis to leave me now. I must write to my *homme d'affaires* without delay about the legal proceedings I shall most certainly institute against him.” Thus saying and, as the servant opened the door, bowing haughtily and motioning Sosthene to leave, he quietly walked into his bedroom.

The poor marquis left, walking as in a dream. It was not the loss of the money, although he could hardly afford to lose so large a sum; it was not even the loss of the diamond, although that was a heavy blow; but it was the terrible ridicule an exposure of the affair would inevitably bring upon him. Turning these things over in his mind he saw, even before he reached his carriage, that it would be well for him to refrain from any horsewhipping or prosecuting. He drove immediately to the hotel of the Duchesse D'Avray, made a full confession of the matter, and implored her to advise him what to do.

“Oh, *mon Dieu!*” cried the duchesse, wringing her hands. “What a misfortune! There is only one thing for you to do. You must leave Paris, remain absent a month,—of course that *canaille* will never dare take proceedings against you as he threatened,—and on your return have given up all taste for diamonds. *Ces bons Parisiens* will not dare wonder at any

change in your caprices, but it is terrible to leave Paris just the week before the ball of Madame de P.!"

It was terrible, but it had to be done. Sosthène left that night and fled to Rome, where he, however, remained more than a month, for he found there a human and female diamond which more than consoled him for the loss of the mineral one; and judging that no setting would become it but a wedding ring, he succeeded in overcoming his hatred of matrimony, and is now a useful member of society and one of the noisiest of the *centre droit*.

THE LUCK OF THE DEVIL



“Οἱ κύβοι Διὸς ἀεὶ ἐυπισπτοῦσι.”

CHAPTER I

WERE guide-books to London Society compiled for the use of our country cousins, there can be but little doubt that—provided, of course, the work were honestly and thoroughly done—some such paragraphs as the following would be found therein. “On leaving Sporting Society, properly so called, and turning to the right, if you ascend a few steps, you will find yourself on the confines of the Marlborough House *coterie*, and there, on the left side of the entrance, your eye will light upon an object of considerable social interest—Mr. James Seymour Mordaunt, late of the Household Cavalry. Nobody knows who Mr. Seymour Mordaunt is, and for many years past most people have given up making inquiries. He came to London five-and-twenty years ago with apparently plenty of money in his pocket

and certainly no ordinary amount of swagger attached to his attractive person. His last *habitat* would appear to have been India, and malicious people have been heard to whisper that his grandmother was dark skinned and his father a carriage builder in Calcutta; but even if these suggestions (probably born of envy) should be true, it is certain that the Indian blood has merely served to enhance the peculiar beauty of countenance for which Mr. Mordaunt is famous, and it is beyond all question that the fact of his father having been engaged in the peculiar line of trade just mentioned has not put a spoke in the wheel of Mr. Seymour Mordaunt's very extraordinary social success in London. Mr. Seymour Mordaunt may be said to have come, and been seen, and conquered. How in the world he ever got into the Greens must remain a matter of conjecture, but it is probable that the late Duchess of Hampstead, who was notorious for her good taste in manly beauty, thinking that the stalwart and well-proportioned limbs and figure of Mr. Seymour Mordaunt would look well in the uniform of Her Majesty's Household Cavalry, used her ducal influence in high quarters to have the commission obtained without too many inquiries being made. But be this as it may, the fact remains, that one morning, shortly after his

arrival from India, Mr. Seymour Mordaunt (who, by the way, is familiarly known as 'Jim Seymour') awoke to find himself gazetted to the Greens ; and 'quite too lovely' as all the ladies voted him to be out of uniform, in full regimentals he was certainly a thing of beauty, and his female admirers, one and all, made up their minds that they would bind themselves together to do their best to make him a joy for ever. All jealousy was put aside, and Mr. Seymour Mordaunt was made, as it were, into a co-operative society, in which all pretty and titled and influential women had a share, and the profits of the transaction, if any, were doubtless equally divided in proportion among the fair subscribers. He married and is now a widower."

So much, probably, and no more, would a Society guide-book have told us about Seymour Mordaunt, had that valuable compilation been given to the public but twelve short months ago ; but since then, towards the end, the affairs of Jim Seymour underwent so startling a change, and assumed suddenly so criminal and tragic an aspect, that one could hardly expect to find an account of the last hours of this curled darling of fashion set forth in any book dealing merely with the frivolities of life. The following is a true and authentic record of those last hours.

It is three o'clock on a dull February after-

noon, and "Ce cher Seymour," as Jimmy is called in Paris, is seated in one of his London clubs and telling himself that the end has come at last, that there is no hope anywhere, and that he must either "bolt" or die. Things have been going from bad to worse for some time past, but now they have reached a climax. They began to grow wrong eighteen months ago,—by degrees, of course, at first,—but now it was all over. It was now no question of merely having "got the knock," although "the knock" had most certainly been obtained by him, and Judæa had suddenly very distinctly declined to lend its atmosphere any longer to the flying of his kites. But the thought that the wages due for his innumerable sins might possibly be about to be partly discounted at the Bankruptcy Court, while awaiting their full payment at the Palace of the Pale Horseman, did not in any way affright him; money troubles had indeed never frightened him, for he had always, so far at least, succeeded one way or another in weathering the storm. Then again, if it had been only money he needed—although money he did need and sorely need—he could have married again for money, as he had done before. It was, as his first experience of such a venture reminded him, not altogether a pleasant way of cleansing soiled linen,—the water being apt at times to be

too hot, and the saponaceous element not always being so generously distributed as the eager washer might desire,—but still it was a way; and if England expects every man to do his duty, it is surely not too much to ask her to provide him with a wife worth at least ten thousand a year wherewith to do it comfortably, for it is obvious that when that same tiresome Nelson exclaimed, “Victory or Westminster Abbey!” he had entirely omitted to take into consideration the existence of an Official Receiver, as affording yet a third solution to the enigma of life. But this was not merely pecuniary disaster with which he was threatened now—it was absolute and hopeless ruin. That meddlesome Lord Frognal had discovered some terrible complication about cards in which he, Jim Seymour, had been mixed up. His lordship indeed held in his possession some damning evidence that would for ever relegate Seymour to Coventry, if indeed it did not send him to the treadmill; and not only did Frognal hold this evidence, but he solemnly vowed that he would publish it to the world if the culprit did not leave, not only London, but England, at once and for ever.

Seymour Mordaunt had only received that very morning the fatal letter bringing him his death warrant, but he knew every word of it by

heart. We need only quote one passage—the following: “I will give you till midnight to-day.” The letter was dated that very morning. “I am forced to go to Windsor, and shall not be back in town till after eleven to-night, so you can have the whole day free and to yourself. If on my return—or rather, if by midnight—I find you have not taken your name off every club and left London and England for ever, I shall at once expose you.” It was now three, so there was still plenty of time, for after all there was nothing very much to be done. Flight, of course, was impossible, or at least so he told himself, for he had no money and no time to get any money—that is, any sum that would be of the least good to him. He would perhaps, later on in the evening, borrow something (as a matter of fact he happened that day to be almost penniless), and have one final plunge and gamble. If he won a lot, that is, a sum large enough to enable him to live comfortably abroad for a time, he would fly; but if he lost,—and lately he had been terribly unlucky,—or if he only won some paltry sum, he would destroy himself. He was by no means a coward, and did not in any way shrink from death. He had very often foreseen the possibility of his being forced to take his own life, and this being the case, it was odd enough that he had never taken the pre-

caution to provide himself with any means of slipping out by any of the "blind ways" spoken of by the dying Tresham in Browning's immortal tragedy. But as a matter of fact he was the happy possessor of neither pistol, nor dagger, nor poison. He would have to get something of the kind in the course of the afternoon, that was all. The only pity was that he would have no chance of revenging himself on Frogal before leaping into the dark stream. If he only knew where to find Frogal at about midnight he would go after him, shoot him, and shoot himself directly afterwards; but Frogal had been a wily dog, and probably foreseeing that such a kind thought would occur to him—Seymour Mordaunt—had prudently elected to absent himself until the last fatal minute. How very unlucky! But then, Jim Seymour was dead out of luck just then. Now, which should it be—pistol, or knife, or poison? and if poison, what poison? The woman who hesitates is, as we know, lost, but the man who hesitates not unfrequently has a drink; and Seymour Mordaunt was no exception to the general rule, as he sat in one of the cosiest and most exclusive clubs in London on that dull February afternoon, weighing carelessly in his mind the relative merits of steel, lead, and poison, as methods of sending in his resignation. One important step he had

indeed already taken: he had sent his inquisitive valet into the country, and the man would not be back until the following afternoon—hours, of course, after all would be over, one way or the other. He had sent the man on this errand into the country almost directly after having received Frogнал's letter that morning, and he was quite alone in his little house in Mayfair, for he had only arrived in town *en route* for Monte Carlo three days before, and even the caretaker had been dismissed; so that, either for flight or suicide, he was very favourably circumstanced—a fact which struck him as proving to him that luck had not, perhaps, altogether deserted him after all! Oh, if he could only find Frogнал!—if he could only find himself face to face with Frogнал for five minutes! then he would be happy! Well, he must wait and see; he might stumble across him before it was too late, after all. A brandy-and-soda taken in moments of mental conflict has at least one precious merit—it generally leads to a repetition of the same dose; and Jim Seymour was just about to order a second edition of the exhilarating beverage when Vernon Macdonald passed him and paused.

“Come for a walk, Jim?” said he.

“Where?”

“Anywhere—stretch your legs.”

“All right!”

“As a matter of fact,” explained Macdonald, when they had got into the street, “I am going to the chemist’s to ask him about this,” holding up an envelope. “It’s one of Maryx’s prescriptions, which Forbes brought back from Vienna and gave me last night. He says it is simply marvellous.”

“What is it for?” asked Mordaunt.

“The nerves.”

“Ah! then it does not interest me—I have no nerves,” carelessly remarked the scoundrel, who was booked for the Stygian packet leaving not later than twelve that very night. But the thought that they were going to a place where those noxious drugs were sold, one of which (no matter which—the most deadly) he so greatly desired to be possessed of, and the purchasing of which in sufficient quantities he had heard described as not so very easy, kept Jim quiet and a listener to his friend’s silly babble until they reached the shop.

Macdonald himself had of course nothing whatever the matter with his nerves, but Leopold Maryx was a celebrity; many leaders of fashion in London, and very exalted personages indeed, were suffering from deranged nerves; Eustace Forbes had brought this prescription back from Vienna as being a document of priceless value;

and so Vernon—always anxious to be *dans le mouvement*—decided that it would be quite worth his while to know all about this wonderful medicine without delay. While Macdonald was explaining his business to the head man, Mordaunt lounged listlessly about the shop.

“What are these things?” he asked the shopman, pointing to a quantity of glass vessels lying as if on exhibition upon a small table, covered with black velvet, which stood in a remote corner of the shop. These glass vessels were transparent, flat-bottomed, round, and arched, about the size and shape of a bun, and each one—they were all labelled in gold-and-black letters—contained what looked like specimens of minerals of different colours, shapes, and sizes.

“Those are what we call domes, sir, and contain very valuable specimens of crystals. Some of them are indeed very rare and beautiful.”

“You don’t use them, I suppose?” inquired Mordaunt, glancing carelessly at the strange glass receptacles, that looked something like paper-weights, and were severally labelled, somewhat in this fashion—“Ferri Ammonio Sulphas,” “Hydrargyri Biniodidum,” “Plumbi Iodidum,” “Ferri Lactas,” “Potassii Cyanidum,” etc. etc.

“Oh no, sir,” replied the man; “we only keep them for show.”

Here Mordaunt’s eyes fell upon one of these

curious domes, which was filled with a bright, sparkling substance looking like Epsom salts. It was labelled "Strychnia."

"Do they really all contain what the label says?" he asked carelessly.

"Oh yes, sir."

"But isn't it dangerous to leave strychnine out like that?"

"Well, no sir, hardly," replied the man. "No one would certainly care to steal that! That dome contains enough strychnine to kill half London."

Just then two ladies came in, and directly behind them an old gentleman and a servant; so Mordaunt, taking advantage of the shop being thus suddenly filled with people, and of the shopman's attention being withdrawn, slipped the dome labelled "Strychnia" into his voluminous greatcoat pocket just as he saw Vernon Macdonald emphasising his last words with his outstretched hand. It was all done easily and in a second. He slipped the strychnia into his pocket, and just pushed the other domes about a little. They looked somewhat displaced—that was all. No experienced shop-lifter could have done the trick more neatly.

"And now, Vernon," he said, when they got outside, "I'm off. I've got an engagement I forgot all about. See you to-night, I suppose.

Ta, ta!" And jumping into a cab he drove home.

How desolate and lonely everything looked in the house, to be sure!—and no wonder, for not only the house was empty, but the furniture looking-glasses, pictures, chandeliers and so on, were still shrouded from the dust, just as they had been covered after his departure for Homburg the preceding August. He had only been in town for a few hours at a stretch since then, and even now was supposed to be only *en passant*. Desolate and lonely, indeed, but quite cheerful enough for all he had to do, he told himself with a smile. He would pack first, get things ready to fly in case he should win money at cards and not be forced to use some of the precious contents of this dome just at present, and in London; for of course he intended, under any circumstances, taking the purloined strychnine with him abroad in case of emergencies. So he went upstairs, after having first hung up his hat and his greatcoat, which contained the poison, in the hall, and began opening drawers and pulling about and unlocking packing-cases and trunks and boxes and portmanteaux. Suddenly there came a ring and a knock at the door. Who the deuce could it be? Never mind; let them ring. He would not open. There was nobody he wanted to see—nobody

but Frogna! and it was hardly likely that he— But, by Jove, why not? Stranger things than that had happened, after all! Frogna! might have taken it into his head to call and bully him, for he was an arrant little bully, and now, having the whip hand, could do as he pleased! Not quite as he pleased, though, Mordaunt reminded himself with a smile. If Frogna! should call on him now, or in fact meet him anywhere that afternoon or that night, things would certainly not go quite as his lordship might please! Again a knock and a ring: well, he would go and see who it was. After all it could do no harm. If it were an ordinary visitor he could get rid of him at once, but if it should chance to be Frogna! Suppose his good luck should have thought fit to come back to him now, as it were, for the last time, just before the end, and this should really happen to be Frogna! What delight! He'd kill the dog at once, of course, with a carving-knife, poker, anything, and then, after he had despatched his enemy, he would open that wonderful dome and see what those sparkling crystals could do for him! Thus deciding, he went downstairs in his shirt sleeves and opened the door.

CHAPTER II

"O JIMMY, it's I! Aren't you glad to see me?"

No Frogna! this: only Lily Primrose of the Drollery Theatre. The disappointment was so bitter, the revulsion of feeling so great, that Mordaunt stamped his foot.

"You can't come in," he said harshly and rudely; "I'm engaged!"

"But I must come in, Jimmy, if only for a moment. I've got good news for you—money! Kid has caved in and parted."

Now, this was indeed good news, for "Kid" was Lord Kidderminster, eldest son of Lord Devizes, and Lily was bringing an action for breach of promise of marriage against his lordship.

"Good God! Caved in, has he? Well, I thought he would, little ass! Come in."

Then, when the girl had come in and he had closed the door behind her, he continued—

"I said I was engaged, Lily, because I'm packing—my servant's away, I have to do it all myself, and it's a terrible bore. But you don't mind coming up to my bedroom and chatting while I'm getting my traps together, do you?"

"What a silly question! Of course not."

So he led the way, and she followed him.

"Why, what large trunks you've got, Jim!"

exclaimed Miss Primrose. "They're like ladies' trunks!"

"They *are* ladies' trunks," he replied, smiling. "But why should ladies absorb all that is best? I always have them. I hate having my things folded and tumbled."

"You're off to Monte Carlo, I suppose?"

Mordaunt nodded.

"I envy you!" said Miss Primrose, sighing. "Suppose I get into one of those big trunks and you take me with you?"

"All right; by all means, if you like," he replied, laughing and lighting a cigarette. "You'd be perfectly comfortable. You could lie at full length; there's plenty of room for two of your size. D——n that woman!" he suddenly broke out, as somebody in the next house, and apparently in the next room, began playing, or rather trying to play, on the piano, Sidney Smith's "Jet d'Eau"; "she is always playing that infernal thing! She'd drive me mad in time, if I stayed here! Thank God I'm leaving! What makes you look so pale, Lily?" he continued.

"I'm very tired. I've been all day with the solicitors, and eaten nothing since breakfast."

"I'm sorry I've nothing to offer you to eat here, my dear; but there's plenty to drink if you"—

"Presently," she interrupted; "not just yet. I want to tell you what I've done."

"Well?"

"Kid gives eight thou., if I stop proceedings."

"Eight, does he? Well, that's not much! You haven't taken it, have you?"

"Yes, I have."

"What a little fool! You could easily have got double. So you've chucked it all up for eight thou., have you?"

Lily nodded.

"I never saw such a man as you are, Jim!" she exclaimed, throwing herself wearily into an arm-chair. "You are never satisfied."

Mordaunt began folding some silk underclothes and laying them on the bed.

"Never satisfied, you think?" he remarked carelessly. "Well, I don't know that the matter concerns me very much after all—does it Lily?"

"I should think it did, as I've promised to lend you some of it," she replied, with a touch of irony in her voice.

So, indeed, she had, now he thought of it, but that was before Frogmal had hurled this thunderbolt. Nothing, of course, that she could do for him now would be of any good to him, unless, indeed, she could at once lend him the money for that last gamble that night—that final plunge.

"Ah, yes, so you did, Lily. I remember now; I asked you, and you said you would. It was very good of you, but I don't think I shall need it now."

The girl, who seemed quite exhausted and worn out, and who had half closed her eyes, opened them now and stared at him. She knew him well, and what she heard surprised her.

"So you're in luck, then?" she inquired.

"In luck?" he echoed. Then with a laugh, "Not I! When do they pay you this money, Lily?"

"As soon as some deed is drawn up—in a day or two, I believe."

Mordaunt threw up his hands.

"Ah! that's always the way with those brutes, the solicitors," he exclaimed. "They always take such a devil of a time that the money is useless when it comes! Now, I would gladly give two thousand the day after to-morrow for the use of one thousand now, to-night, at once."

"What would you do with it?" inquired Miss Primrose. "Gamble, I suppose?"

Mordaunt nodded.

"Of course," he answered.

The girl laughed.

"Well, really, Jim," she said, "you're a fool to be so frank; and what's more, you wouldn't have been if you'd only known beforehand what

I'm going to tell you. It so happens I have nearly a thousand pounds about me now, but I certainly shan't give you a penny of it to gamble with!"

"You say you've got nearly a thousand pounds about you?" exclaimed the man, leaving the bed, on which he was folding his things, and coming up to where the girl sat, or rather reclined, in the big arm-chair.

"Well, eight hundred, to be quite accurate," she said, with a smile.

"Where the deuce did you get it?" inquired Mordaunt. "I don't believe it—let me see it."

"What do you want to see it for? It isn't mine. I was only joking when I spoke as if I might lend it to you if I liked. Of course I can't; it isn't mine."

"I don't believe you've got it, Lily."

"Indeed I have; I swear I have."

"Let me see it, and I'll believe you."

"Well, if I show you, will you promise not to snatch?"

"How absurd! Of course."

Then Miss Lily took out her purse, showed the money,—£800, there could be no doubt about it,—all in notes. She simply held them up before him, counted them, and then replaced them and put the purse back into her pocket.

"If it were mine you should have it, Jim," she

said, "but the truth of the matter is, this money belongs to my married sister; she sent me for it, and I must give it to her to-night. In a day or two, when I get Kid's money, I'll lend you what you like—but not to gamble with, mind."

But Mordaunt was not listening to her. He knew the girl well, and the moment he heard the money was not hers but her sister's, he knew no mortal power would induce her to give or lend it to anyone. Then again, he recognised the mistake he had made in avowing that if he had such a sum of money he would gamble with it. It was merely a trivial mistake, and under ordinary circumstances would not have counted, but now any mistake, no matter how trifling, was important, for his time was so short. He only had till twelve o'clock, and it was now past four and growing dark—his last night of life, probably. Eight hundred pounds was of course a small sum, but it was much more than he could be sure of borrowing at that season of the year, and that night, and at once. He had "got the knock"; the Jews would not stand him now at any price, and none of his most intimate friends were in town. He might succeed in borrowing a hundred or two, perhaps, to have a gamble with before the fatal hour of midnight struck, but that would be the *bout du monde*, he told himself. Now, with this £800 he might

really do something ; and of course it was life or death to him that he should do something before twelve o'clock—within the next seven hours, in fact. But this train of thought was suddenly interrupted by a weak, muffled cry from the girl.

“Jim! Ji”—

He sprang forward, bent over her, took her in his arms, and looked at her. It was getting so dark that he had to bring his face close to hers to see it plainly, and now he saw that she was ashen pale, that her lips were parted and quivering, her eyes uplifted—in a word, that she was fainting, yes, fainting—or— The possibility of the second alternative thrilled him.

“I'm fainting,” murmured the girl—“brandy!”

And Mordaunt, withdrawing his arm from around her, ran out of the room and downstairs for the required stimulant. It was not until he was in his sitting-room below, where he knew the brandy to be,—not indeed until, having made his way directly to it, even in the growing dusk, he had grasped the bottle in his hand,—that the devil took entire possession of him, and that he asked himself the question, “Shall I kill her?” “Yes, yes, yes!” whispered the shadows; “kill her! kill her! kill her! You'll have to die yourself if you don't win, and you can't win if you don't have this money! And she won't give you

this money! So kill her! kill her! kill her!" Here the woman next door, who had been quiet for the past few minutes, began again fumbling at the keys of the piano; nothing definite, not even the scales, nor a chord, nor an octave at first, merely a finger here and a finger there. What should he do? Here the woman next door struck an octave. Well, this was what he'd do: if that woman began playing that accursed "Jet d'Eau" again, he would kill Lily Primrose; if not he would wait and see. Again an octave—his heart almost stood still, again an octave—then—then a chord, then both hands on the board and a flourish, and then, without further delay, the "Jet d'Eau"! Mordaunt broke out into a cold sweat. He was answered. There was no misunderstanding that! He'd given Lily Primrose a chance for her life and she'd missed it! It was heads or tails, and she might have won! But there was not a moment to be lost. He wouldn't need the brandy now—not just yet—later on he would, when he had done what he had to do. So, putting the bottle back on to the table, he crept upstairs again, not running up two steps at a time, as he would naturally have done, but going up slyly, precisely, swiftly, noiselessly, like an unclean thing slipping by in the darkness. He entered the room thus, and, the slight light from the fire aiding him,

stole quickly up to the arm-chair where the girl was lying. She opened her eyes.

“I’m better,” she murmured. “Have you got the br—?” But she never finished the word, for his hands were at her throat. And so, with his eyes staring into hers, in that firelit gloom,—his eyes burning with the flame of murder looking into hers, from which the first hideous glare of horror faded by degrees away, giving place to the dull glaze of death as the merciless grip around her throat tightened, tightened, tightened,—he held her, and he strangled her, and he waited; looking at those dreadful things—not eyes now, surely—protruding from their sockets, and at the no less hideous tongue pushed out from between the poor discoloured lips as if in mockery, but hardly thinking of them; listening rather, really merely listening, to the repeated and then again repeated, and then over and over and over again repeated, attempt to master the “*Jet d’Eau*” in the adjoining house. Little by little the firelight dwindled down fainter and fainter and the darkness increased, shrouding by degrees from the fixed gaze of the panting murderer the awful work of his hands, until at length an ember fell and he could see no more, only hear and feel—hear the eternal “*Jet d’Eau*” constantly begun and never ended, and feel, ah! feel now distinctly in the darkness, that the

thing his two murderous hands were clutching was undergoing some gradual, stealthy, horrible change, from what it had been when first he had seized and gripped it in the light. Suddenly the noise of the piano, of the "Jet d'Eau," next door ceased, and silence came to join the darkness. This was intolerable! So far the sound of the piano had, as it were, kept him company, but now!— With a terrible effort—for so acute had his nervous excitement by this time become that the mere loosening of his clutch and removing of his hands was a great effort—he sprang back and, making his way to the mantelshelf, struck a match, lit the gas, and then turned and looked at his victim. Yes, she was quite dead; there could be no doubt about that. But the face was so horrible to look at that, after having satisfied himself that he had done his hellish work thoroughly well, he took a light Eton-blue silk night-dress from the bed on which it was lying and threw it over the head of the dead woman. Then he sat down directly opposite this horrible chair-load and began thinking. He must have been mad he told himself—perfectly mad! His plight had been bad enough before; indeed, he had thought only half an hour ago that it could hardly be worse, but now he had made it a thousand, a million, times worse. Then he had merely been threatened with beggary,

dishonour, say absolute ruin, that might indeed have led him to commit suicide had he elected to do so, but now he had of his own will and accord, and with no particular object in view, committed a base, stupid, brutal, cowardly crime that ranked him with such vile common miscreants as Lefroy, Lamson, and the like, and that made it the bounden duty of civilised society to put him to a shameful and degrading death. He had often wondered how murderers felt just after they had done the deed and made all men their enemies, and now he knew. They doubtless felt as he felt—wildly desirous to escape from the consequences of their crime; for, oddly enough, this would-be suicide of an hour ago, now that he had made it almost an absolute impossibility that one way or another he should escape a violent death for long, seemed suddenly to cling to life, and looked upon the likelihood of his being driven to self-destruction with feelings of horror and repugnance. Yes, he must try and escape; he would probably not succeed, nay, almost certainly not succeed, but he would try. Thus deciding, he rose, went to the dead body and took out the contents of the pockets. There was nothing there of importance save the purse. This he opened, counted over once more the money it contained, and put it in his pocket. Then he suddenly remembered

what the girl had jokingly said about the trunk being large enough to hold her! So it was! What a lucky idea! Cautiously and with great difficulty he wheeled the chair containing the ghastly burden close up to the open trunk, tied the light-blue silk garment around the stiffened head, that he might see that face no more, and then, stooping and taking the body in his arms, he by a Herculean effort lifted it from the chair and slid it into the trunk, where it fell with hideous clumsiness and rigidity on to a mass of gaudy smoking suits and dressing jackets. Then he put in the girl's muff and umbrella by her side, threw in every kind of wearing apparel on top of the corpse to fill up the remaining space, shut down the lid and locked the trunk. What was to be done now? Brandy first: he felt tired and almost faint; so, lighting a candle and going downstairs to where he had left the bottle, he drank off three-quarters of a tumblerful of raw spirit at one swallow, and then returned upstairs to the room where the gas burned and the trunk lay. But now he knew what to do. The brandy had told him that. He had the £800—it was a paltry sum, to be sure, but at least it would get him out of England *with his luggage*. He would be forced, of course, to take that horrible trunk with him wherever he should go—never, in fact, leaving it out of his sight until he could dispose

of it, destroy it somehow, get rid of it somewhere ; how or where he knew not, but somehow and somewhere. Yes ; he must get out of England at once, without delay : no thought of gambling, or of Frogal and revenge entered his mind now—the instinct of self-preservation absorbed all. There was plenty of time—yes, thank God, loads of time yet—before the train left Charing Cross for Dover, but nevertheless he would get out of this accursed house without delay. He'd sooner wait at the railway station than here. Once out of England, even once out of this house, he would at least have time to breathe, to reflect, to make plans. The thing now was to go without delay. So he changed his dress, packed away hastily what was necessary, quite careless as to whether what he left thrown about might not indicate sudden flight, and then went out in search of a porter. He knew of old where to find one, and he told the man to bring round a four-wheeler, and come with two other men to help him, as he had a heavy, a very heavy, case full of books to be brought downstairs and put on the cab. At length all was over, and Jim Seymour Mordaunt, "the darling of girls and the chaperon's fear," breathed a long sigh of relief when he found himself seated in the four-wheeled cab driving towards Charing Cross Railway Station, with the

body of the woman he had murdered in a trunk on the roof, and a case containing enough poison to kill fifty thousand men, safely stowed away in his pocket.

CHAPTER III

HE had finished the brandy bottle before leaving, and this and the fresh air and the mere fact of getting about and moving gave his spirits a fillip, and brought him to think of something less gloomy than that horrible trunk and what its ghastly contents might lead to. Sheldon! By Jove! he'd forgotten Sheldon! It was just possible Sheldon might have sent him that thousand he had written to ask him for the day before yesterday, before that terrible letter had come that had changed everything. He had told him to address to the Matador Club. "Cabman, stop at the Matador Club, 98 Gehenna Street."

Now, the Matador Club was a gambling resort kept by Mr. Seton Granville, where gentlemen of rank and fashion assembled at all hours of the day and night, with the laudable intention of taking every advantage of each other that might result in pecuniary profit. Yes; there

was a letter there for him from Sheldon, and an enclosure.

"Can only spare five hundred just now : the rest on Tuesday. Good luck. L. S."

Good luck! Yes, he was in good luck, for he had really hardly expected to hear from Sheldon so soon. He'd get Granville to cash this cheque and then be off. Ah! there was Granville himself in the hall coming towards him now.

"I say Jim, old boy, you're the very man I was looking for. What luck! Dydo's here—he's got back at last; he's upstairs!" exclaimed the proprietor in a low tone, but evidently greatly excited.

"Dydo!" ejaculated Jim Seymour, now fairly amazed at the turn affairs were taking. "Dydo!" he repeated.

Now, Frank Dydo was a young Australian millionaire who delighted in playing for very high stakes, and who knew very little of any game that he played. Mordaunt had had thousands from him, and he and Seton Granville had in fact, for the last six months, been anxiously awaiting the return of the young colonist from the Antipodes, whence he had gone to collect together another small van-load of ready money.

"Yes; he's just arrived, and is asking for you," continued Seton Granville. "Come up."

"I—I—can't," stammered Mordaunt. "I'm leaving town."

"Leaving town? When?"

"To-night—now—at once. I'm off to Charing Cross now to catch the Paris train. That's my cab there, with the—with the—luggage."

"Paris train? Why, you're mad, old man! You've got nearly two hours yet! Loads of time! You must come up!"

Mordaunt hesitated. An hour at cards with Dydo might mean two thousand. How long he had been waiting for this man to return from Melbourne! Good God, how long! And now to return just at such a moment as this!

"Well, I'll just go on, leave my things at the station, and come back," he said slowly.

"Why waste time?" urged Granville. "Let the cab wait. Dydo will be off if you don't catch him now, and he's off to Monte Carlo himself to-morrow night. Let the cab wait."

In a moment Mordaunt had made up his mind.

"Very well," he said, "I will."

Then, after having instructed a servant to tell his cabman to wait, he went upstairs to pluck the colonial pigeon. *Ecarté* at first, and what luck at once! He plunged, and plunged, and plunged,—for Dydo was full of money and in high spirits,—and won, and won, and won. In

the excitement of the game he quite forgot about the time.

"I say, Jim, you've lost your train! It's after eight!" exclaimed Granville, coming up.

"After eight!" gasped the murderer, remembering his cab and his luggage. "Good God! is it? How dreadful!"

"Dreadful, do you call it? Delightful I should think you meant," laughed Dydo, who was a little drunk. "Why, you've got the luck of the devil, Seymour. See all you've won!"

"Never mind about the train, Jim," put in Seton Granville, who had noticed the look of agony and horror that had flitted across the man's face. "It's gone now—you'd better dine here now, and not break your luck. Dydo's right. You seem to have the luck of the devil to-night! Send your cab away and have your luggage put in the hall, or sent back to your diggings."

Mordaunt shook his head. As the train was gone, it was gone. He'd have to take another one later on—one going no matter where, so that it took him out of London; but, in the meantime, the less that trunk was touched the better.

"No," he said; "I shall keep the cab. I'll dine and stay here for an hour or so, but I must be off early, and I shall keep the cab. Dine with me, Dydo, will you?"

After dinner, more gambling and more good luck. He raked the money in, hand over hand; and, what with the excitement of the success and of the drink, he became desperate, and plunged more and more, but each time with renewed good luck. Twice the cabman sent up word to remind him of his existence, and twice he sent down the same message—"Tell him he must wait; I'm coming presently—if he's cold he must drink of course"—and gave money for this purpose. Luck! luck! luck! overwhelming luck! he couldn't do wrong!

"By Jove, Mordaunt!" exclaimed little Lord Carshalton at about eleven, astonished at what he saw going on at the baccarat-table; "you've the luck of the devil to-night!"

"The luck of the devil!" The words seem to photograph themselves on to Mordaunt's enfevered brain. Twice already had this expression been applied to his success before, that night. "The luck of the devil!" Yes, he told himself, it *was* the luck of the devil: it was luck risen fresh from hell that he had brought with him in the trunk waiting outside there in the cold and windy street. He had become that night, body and soul, the devil's own, and this luck was indeed infernal, and part of the purchase-money. He remembered having once, at Monte Carlo, touched the body of a suicide,

and having then played directly afterwards at the tables ; and he remembered well how on that occasion his run of bad luck had suddenly been broken, and he had won largely. To-night he had committed murder—the most base, cruel, cowardly murder, even the mind of Satan could conceive—and had come fresh from slaughter, bringing the mauled body of his victim with him almost to the very gaming-table to play. What wonder, then, that, with so potent a talisman as this, luck should be his? The luck of the devil? Gad! they were right! It was!

Suddenly the sound of a clock striking the half-hour attracted his attention, and looking at his watch he found to his dismay that it was half-past eleven. This was one of Frogal's lounging-places, and he might be in at any moment now. It would never do to meet him and have a row there, and an *exposé* now, with that terrible cab-load at the door. It would not be ruin and dishonour: it would be the gallows.

“I'm off now!” he said, rising abruptly. “I must really go!”

This announcement was greeted with a perfect storm of expostulation and entreaty from men who had been losing their money to him all the evening, and who relied upon a continuance of the gambling to enable them, perchance, to retrieve in some measure their losses; and so

eloquent were these appeals, and so loth was Mordaunt himself to stop playing in the full tide of his marvellous, his devilish, success, that at length a compromise was come to.

“I don’t mind playing all night, but not here,” said Mordaunt, gulping down a twelfth brandy-and-soda; “I won’t play or stay here another minute—I’m off!”

“Will you come to my rooms, then, and play there?” inquired a boy, who had just joined the Life Guards, and who was charging down the road to ruin. “It’s only a step—Jermyn Street. And will you come, and you come, and you come?” he added, addressing others. And so a party was made up, composed of Mordaunt and those gentlemen who had been losing heavily to him, and who were therefore the most anxious to have their revenge, and a start was made for Jermyn Street. The moment Mordaunt and his friends reached the door of the club-house, the murderer looked eagerly for his cab. Yes, there it was, and the big black trunk on top of it, the trunk whose contents had brought him luck, but oh! at how terrible a price!

The cabman came up to him, and Mordaunt could see at once that the man had been acting on the advice given him and been drinking.

“I am going to No. — Jermyn Street with

these gentlemen for a few minutes," Mordaunt said, looking at the man sternly. "Come on there, but walk your horse slowly, and come on with us: I shan't get in, but I want to keep you in sight. Do you hear what I say?" This last was added very sharply.

"Yes, sir," mumbled the man, greatly disgusted that his waiting was not yet over.

"Well, then, do as I say—keep on just in front of me, so that if I want to get in at any moment I can."

The man went back to his cab, mounted his box, and in a minute the procession set out, the cab with the body of the murdered woman going on a yard ahead, and the party of gentlemen following. When first he had noticed that his cabman was rather the worse for drink it had occurred to Mordaunt that perhaps he had better drive to some railway station, deposit his luggage there, and then come back and gamble, but this plan he had at once on reflection rejected, for it entailed parting with that which brought him his supernatural luck—the dead body! No, that night, and while he gambled, he must have the corpse of the woman he had murdered close at hand, or his luck would change, he felt sure of that; so, for the short time it would take him to win another few thousands, he would keep his drunken cabman

and the precious, though awful, talisman, of which he was the guardian, near him. Once in the young Life Guardsman's rooms, the drinking and the gambling began again with increased vigour, and Mordaunt's luck, the luck of the devil, continued undiminished for a time, but then—suddenly, just as he was plunging the most desperately, emboldened by the unbroken success that had so far attended him, and his enfevered brain whispering to him that, with the co-operation of that hideous dumb ally and confederate lurking in that trunk below, his luck was invincible—he lost!

The sum at stake was great, but it was not that that made the man's face turn to an ashen pallor, and prompted him once more, and for the twentieth time, to drench himself with alcohol: it was the fact, the horrible, terrible fact, that he should have lost at all! Again he played, and again he lost; again he played, and again he lost! Then more brandy. Was the devil deserting him? Ah! what should he do then? Was even murder, the most base, the most cruel, murder losing its power to aid him? Then he hazarded an immense stake and lost it; then in an ecstasy of superstition, and wild with drink and terror, he put down all that remained to him of his winnings and Sheldon's cheque, all that he possessed in the world, in fact, keeping

only the £800 he had taken from the murdered woman by him ; and this, merely for the devil's sake, to try and win the devil back to him by thus keeping the murder-money, for the sum itself seemed trivial and useless to him now, after all the thousands that he had handled. Again he lost, and then he rose, deathly pale, but controlling his emotion with a mighty effort.

"I think I'd better leave off now," he said, with a smile. "You chaps have got it all back now, so we're quits."

"Just one more ! Just one more ! Just one more !" came in appealing tones from every side ; but for a while Mordaunt, who, as a matter of fact, was half dazed, resisted these appeals, shaking his head playfully and getting into his greatcoat.

"Not to-night ; not to-night !" Then suddenly, when he'd got his greatcoat on and felt the case of strychnia in his pocket, he changed his mind.

"Very well, then," he said, seating himself. "Just one more, then," and he staked the whole £800 he had murdered Lily Primrose for ; and as he staked it there came a knocking, knocking, knocking at the hall-door, and one of the men went out to see what could be the cause of such a disturbance at such an hour, for it had just struck half-past one.

Mordaunt lost, swallowed some more brandy-

and-soda, shook his head, smiled, lit a cigar, and rose.

"I'm cleaned out!" he said, smiling, and putting on his hat. "Stone broke! No more cards for me to-night. I must try my luck to-morrow. Good God! what's this?" he broke off suddenly, as the door opened and he saw a police constable and his cabman in the hall outside.

But the man who had gone out to the hall-door to answer the knocking came in laughing.

"I say Jim!" he exclaimed, convulsed with mirth, "your cabman's lost his cab."

"Lost his cab?"

"Yes, sir," began the cabman, very penitent; "I just went in to have a glass before closing-time, and as I came out I see two young toffs in evening-dress, but looking rather as if they'd had a drop too much, clamber on to the box, whip up the old horse, and off they goes down the street; me hollerin' after them, but no good."

"It must have been you, then," broke in the Life-Guardsman. Then, turning to Mordaunt, he added, "Just now, just as you began to lose, I thought I heard somebody in the street calling out, 'Stop! Stop!'"

"That were me, sir," assented the cabman. "Then I meets the perliceman. He says there's no danger."

"No, sir," put in the police constable, "there's no danger, I think, sir. They're not thieves—it's only done for a lark, I think, sir. Gentlemen a little bit *on*, sir. They saw the cab and the luggage and no cabman, and so"—

"Which way did they go?" gasped Mordaunt.

"Round into St. James's Street, up Piccadilly, sir. They won't go far."

"Wait for me here a minute—I shan't be a second," cried Mordaunt, throwing away his cigar; and, without waiting for further parley, he dashed past the men, out of the door, and into the street, and into the night. He pulled up the collar of his coat to avoid recognition, and burying both hands in his pockets, one hand convulsively clasping the poison-case, he began running, running, quickly running, but as noiselessly and unobtrusively as possible, in the direction of his house.

"Not in the street," he kept saying to himself; "not in the street! not in the street!"

The run was a long one, but he needed it, for the least inactivity then would have driven him mad: and at length he reached his house, and saw his well-known door, which he had hoped never to see again. He opened the door noiselessly with his latchkey, closed it as noiselessly behind him, then struck a light and lit a candle, and went upstairs. There was not a single

moment to spare ; what he had to do was indeed horrible, but what was even more horrible was that he now, for the first time, felt himself to be a coward, and told himself that if he did not do this thing at once he would perhaps never do it, and then — ! So merely throwing aside his hat, and not waiting to take off his greatcoat or gloves, he took out the glass containing the strychnia and tried to open it. He had hardly more than looked at it before, and now he found the case was tightly closed and that he could not open it. It is probable that the trivial resistance thus offered him alone nerved him to do the dreadful deed he had in hand ; for his courage had now almost wholly left him, and he felt mentally and physically broken up, as if he had been beaten with a hammer. But this trivial resistance aroused him, and, taking the poker, he dealt the glass vessel a blow which split it in two, the glittering white crystals pouring out into the palm of his gloved hand, and the two heavy pieces of glass falling to the floor on either side.

He had a whole fist-full now, so, without another second's delay, he bent his head and eagerly, ravenously, as if it were something his whole soul lusted for, devoured the bitter stuff, and then threw himself upon his face upon the floor. He had not long to wait.

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